

NEWSLETTER

Updating Hampshire's History

No. 25

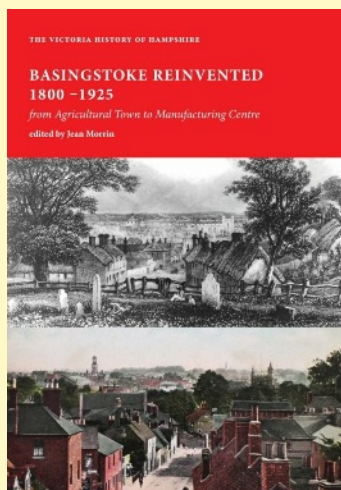
Spring 2025

VICTORIA
COUNTY
HISTORY



Hampshire

NEW PUBLICATION 14 June 2025



Basingstoke Reinvented 1800 to 1925 **From Agricultural Town to Manufacturing Centre**

The book covers the period when the town was transformed from a market town serving north-east Hampshire into a manufacturing centre producing goods for the national and international markets. Thomas Burberry, founder of the famous fashion house, established three factories in the town and produced gabardine. Wallis and Stevens developed from a local company supplying agricultural machinery into a producer of road rollers, threshing machines, trucks and pumps which were sold worldwide. Thornycroft moved to Basingstoke in 1898 and produced lorries for the military and civilian markets. All relied on the railways for the supply of raw materials and the export of finished products. This study of local industrialisation contributes to a debate about how far manufacturing developed in southern towns after its initial establishment in the north of England and Scotland.

Price £15.99

Purchase your copy from: contact@vchhamshire.org

JANE AUSTEN, 250 years

Memorialising Jane Austen

Given the amount of attention that the anniversaries of Jane Austen's birth and death receive today, it is perhaps chastening to consider what happened in the past. For example, on the hundredth anniversary of her birth in December 1875 the following comments from *The Athenaeum* were reproduced in a large number of provincial newspapers, such as the *Cheltenham Examiner*:



"On the 16th of December, 1775, Jane Austen was born at the Parsonage House of Steventon, in Hampshire. We confess we are glad that no-one has proposed to celebrate the centenary of her birth; such noisy manifestations would have ill accorded with the genius of the most charming of English novelists."

Frustration was expressed, however, that *"no publisher ... [would] give us an edition of her novels, such as Messrs. Smith and Elder are publishing of the Misses Brontes"*. (15 December 1875).

By the time of the hundredth anniversary of her death in July 1917, notwithstanding the Great War, a very modest memorial was erected at Chawton Cottage. As the *Hampshire Independent* reported, it was a simple tablet in oak (see picture). Any surplus funds were to *"be used to institute a scholarship or a school library, according to the amount raised, in the village of Steventon, the birthplace of authoress"* (14 July 1917). Undoubtedly, this was a very modest and understated celebration by today's standards.



Roger Ottewill



Academic Interest

By the end of the 19C, if not earlier, academics were already taking an interest in the life and works of Jane Austen. An example comes from Southampton, where she lived from 1806 to 1809. In October 1892, Mr J A R Marriott gave a lecture on the novelist 'in connection with the Oxford University Extension course'. By way of conclusion he commented that:

"Her fame as a novelist was not of rapid growth; none of her novels took the world by storm, but from her day to the present her popularity had steadily increased, and she had reached a place in the admiration and still more in the affection of English-speaking people, from which he could not believe she could be dislodged by any change of later fashion or revolution in critical ideas."

How correct he was in his assessment!

Roger Ottewill



The Influence of life in Steventon on Jane Austen's writing

Jane Austen's novels drew on characters and manners she observed in local society. Outside the parsonage, Jane Austen mixed with local families and gentry whom she observed acutely, drawing inspiration for the characters and sentiments portrayed in her writing. Her father also taught boarders, up to four sons of the gentry at any one time, and prepared them for university so Jane had considerable opportunity to observe the characteristics of young men both in these students and in her brothers. Jane benefited greatly from the conversation of parents, siblings and pupils in the rural parsonage of Steventon. She became very aware of aristocratic pride and condescension and the limitations imposed by society on those of limited means. In 1783 the Lefroy family moved into Ashe parsonage and Mrs Lefroy, a poetry lover, provided Jane Austen with intellectual stimulus. Jane Austen was saddened when romance did not flourish between her and Tom Lefroy, a visitor to Ashe, but the feelings she experienced and tears shed enabled her to portray the emotional sufferings of her heroines realistically. Austen also understood the impact on her own marriage prospects of having no dowry.

Jean Morrin

Jane and Mrs Rider's Shop in Basingstoke

In October 1798, Jane wrote to her sister, Cassandra, that, when she was travelling back from London on the coach, her mother was taken ill during an overnight stop at Staines. When they reached Basingstoke, there was a wait of over half an hour before continuing to either the Deane Gate or the Wheatsheaf at North Waltham, depending on where the coach was going next. While they were waiting, Jane's mother had something called "a mess of broth" and saw Dr Lyford who told her to take 12 drops of Laudanum before she went to bed and promised to call on her at Steventon in a couple of days. In the meantime, Jane went to Mrs Rider's shop, "... and bought what I intended to buy, but not in much perfection – there were no narrow braces for children and scarcely any netting silk; but Miss Wood as usual is going to town very soon and will buy a fresh stock – I gave 2s 3d a yard for my flannel and I fancy it is not very good; but is so disgraceful and contemptible an article in itself, that it's being comparatively good or bad is of little importance". She said she also bought some Japan ink. This was a superior kind of black writing ink.

In January 1801 Jane wrote to Cassandra: "The Neighbourhood have quite recovered the death of Mrs Rider – so much so, that I think they are rather rejoiced at it now; her Things were so very dear!".

Bob Clarke



The Dean Gate, Dean, poss. early 20C

The Enterprising Mr John Ring

The large red-brick building at 81-83 Church Street was once the 'Cabinet and Upholstery Ware-rooms' of John Ring. He was the person who sold Revd Austen of Steventon the "small Mahogany Writing Desk with a long Drawer and Glass Ink Stand" on which his daughter Jane wrote all her novels, Basingstoke's contribution to world literature and probably the best 12s ever spent.



John Ring left a set of detailed accounts from 1785 to 1796 which listed all his customers and their purchases. Ring supplied everything that was needed to furnish a house, down to the wallpaper, nails and glue. He also employed carpenters, paper hangers and other craftsmen. He supplied the men and materials to build a large bookcase for Revd Austen at a total cost of £4 6s 3d. At the other extreme, he only charged Revd Austen 1s for mending two mahogany chairs.

Ring's customers ranged from the Prince of Wales (later George IV) who was living in Kempshott House from 1788 to 1795, to the publicans and ordinary residents of Basingstoke and district. The Prince of Wales' purchases included a chiming clock in a wainscot case costing £4 10s, feather beds and bedclothes, three dressing tables, a walnut

dining table, a three-foot round wainscot table, wallpaper and window blinds. Ring charged the Prince 3s 6d for the horse, cart, boy and turnpike charge for transporting some of the goods to Kempshott. On another occasion he charged the Prince 1s for the long cord used to tie the goods to the wagon.

Ring sold the Duke of Bolton of Hackwood House "a neat mahogany butler's tray 2 feet 7 inches long 22 inches wide with four brass plates screwed" for 12s, "a dressing glass in a mahogany frame", curtains and three quires of white cartridge paper.

When Thomas Orde-Powlett inherited Hackwood House, one of Ring's men spent four days packing goods and doing other work for him. Later in the year they were employed fitting a new lock, putting up curtains, tying down carpets and bringing a bedstead from Hackwood House to Church Street to be repaired. Ring supplied coffins to the Overseers of Basingstoke for paupers' funerals ("Coffin for Pigden's Child 3s") and a padlock for the prison door.

He was also holding auctions nearly every month as far afield as Newbury, Farnham, Alresford, Aldermaston and Sandhurst, and also found time to be Mayor of Basingstoke five times between 1774 and 1794.

Bob Clarke



Jane Austen's Home in Steventon

Jane was born at the Rectory, down the hill from the church in Steventon. There is now no sign of it in the pasture field where later this summer, a festival to celebrate this event in 1775 will take place. There is



however map evidence and written records in the family archive, and even some drawings. The house was set back from the lane to North Waltham, with a

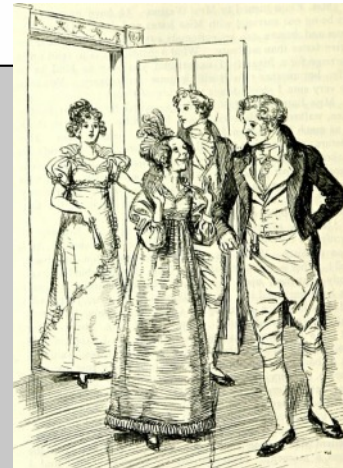
sweep of drive and trees at the rear, also vegetable and fruit gardens and farm buildings; the glebe farm provided a substantial contribution to the Rector's income. Along the lane towards the Triangle were other cottages, now all gone, demolished soon after Jane's death. In 2011, the Rectory Project, supported by grant aid and volunteers, resulted in the location and excavation of the foundations, providing firm evidence for the first time. The fascinating details of the everyday objects found add a special dimension to our picture of the family's life, for instance the blue and white transfer printed pottery that we still love today

Mary Oliver

Visiting and Jane Austen's novels

Visiting was an important part of Jane Austen's social life. She frequently went on foot, an experience later reflected in her novels, to visit neighbours such as the Harwoods in Deane House, the Portals in Ashe, the Bramstons in Oakley Hall and Mrs Lefroy, wife of the rector of Ashe. Similarly the Austens received visitors such as Mrs Heathcote of Hursley Park, Mrs Harwood, Mrs James Austen, the Misses Bigg of Manydown Park, Miss Jane Blachford, of Osborne House, Isle of Wight, but a frequent visitor at Manydown Park and Mr James Holder, tenant of the Portals, at Ashe Park. Close neighbours dined at the rectory, such as the Digweeds and her brother, James, but they were limited in number and Austen noted how dinner parties with the same people present could be tedious.

Jean Morrin



The 'Endless Debaries' of Hurstbourne Tarrant

When visiting her friend Martha Lloyd at Ibthorpe House Jane Austen often reluctantly encountered the four daughters of the Revd Debary, the incumbent of nearby Hurstbourne Tarrant. A decade after Martha left Ibthorpe following her mother's death in 1805, a letter from Jane to her sister included the following bald statement: *"The Debaries are indeed odious!"*. In 1801 Jane had described the elder son of the family as *"a Peter in the blackest sense of the word"*. His offence was to have declined Mr Austen's offer of the Deane curacy.

It was a walk of about a mile along often muddy lanes from the rectory where the sisters lived to Ibthorpe House. Jane found their visits intrusive, describing them as the *"endless Debaries"* in a letter of 1800. On meeting three of them at a ball in that year, Jane informed her sister that she had been *"as civil to them as their bad breath would allow"*.

In fairness, it must be acknowledged that there is evidence elsewhere that many considered the company of the four sisters as pleasurable, and when their brother Peter died in 1841 he was described as *"a liberal minded, honourable & gentlemanly man"*. The oldest sister, Ann, had rendered a service to the Austen family in 1798 by taking on household duties in Deane Rectory when Jane's sister-in-law, the sister of Martha Lloyd, was expecting a child. On this occasion Jane concluded a disparaging description of her netting a gown and wearing a 'pot hat' with the words: *"A short and compendious history of Miss Debary!"*

Sarah Gould

Harris Bigg-Wither's family home

At the other end of Hampshire from Chawton and Steventon lies Wymering. Surprisingly this parish, now swallowed up by Portsmouth, has two close connections to Jane Austen. For over thirty years it was the home of her brother Francis but previously Jane's rejected suitor, Harris Bigg-Wither had lived there. Harris had married Anne Howe Frith and late in 1805 they moved to Wimering house (now called Wymering Manor). Six of their children were baptised in Wymering before they moved to Manydown following his father's death in 1813 but the estate remained in the family until after Harris's death.



Wymering Manor still stands, though its future is far from secure. In 1809, the house was reported to be a desirable and most commodious residence in excellent repair. Among the fashionable features Harris would have known is the large bay with windows on two floors. These look onto the garden, alas, no longer 11 acres in extent and *"laid out with great taste"* as it was then. But unlike so many of the houses familiar to Jane Austen which no longer exist, including Manydown, Wymering Manor remains – for how long?

The energetic Francis Austen

Francis (Frank) Austen did not arrive in Wymering until 1830, when he bought Portsdown Lodge in the parish. His Christian faith was important to him and he soon took part in vestry affairs, attending almost every meeting over many years. He was waywarden and overseer at various times, receiving a vote of thanks from the vestry for the 'very exemplary and honourable way' he had discharged such duties. For many years he was the vicar's churchwarden. At times he chaired meetings and the clarity of the minutes

show he was an able administrator, ensuring parish funds were safeguarded and disputes were settled. Some caused dissension in the church, such as the allocation of pews. Others raised legal difficulties - who was responsible for clearing a ditch and negotiating to extend the burial ground. He proposed the sale of the Poor House in 1835 and was elected as the Guardian for Wymering for the new workhouse. He went on to chair the Board of Guardians for the new Fareham Union, diligently arranging contracts for building, materials and supplies from its inception. On his return from naval duties in the West Indies he became a churchwarden again, serving until 1859, when he was 85 and in poor health. He died in 1865, surviving his wife Martha, Jane's dear friend, and sister Cassandra, who both died at Portsdown Lodge, bringing to an end the Austen Wymering connection.

Janet Hird

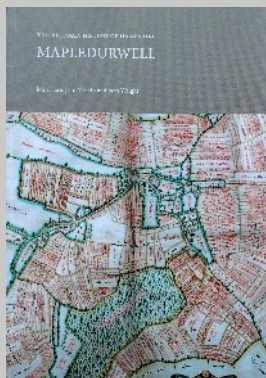
The Unfortunate Mary Martin

On 18 December 1798 Jane Austen wrote to her sister, Cassandra, "*I have received a very civil note from Mrs Martin requesting my name as a Subscriber to her Library which opens the 14th of January ...*" Mary Martin had been the landlady of the Maidenhead Inn on Winchester Street, Basingstoke, ever since her husband died in 1776. In March 1798, she gave up the inn and took over John Chambers' haberdashery and stationery business. In 1799 she opened a subscription library. An annual subscription cost 16s, over £75 in today's money. Jane continues, "*As an inducement to subscribe Mrs Martin tells us that her Collection is not to consist only of Novels, but of every kind of Literature. She might have spared this pretension to our family, who are great Novel-readers and not ashamed of being so: but it was necessary I suppose to the self-consequence of half her subscribers*". In 1800 Mary Martin was declared bankrupt. Jane wrote to Cassandra: "*Our whole Neighbourhood is at present very busy grieving over poor Mrs Martin, who has totally failed in her business, & had very lately an execution in her house*".

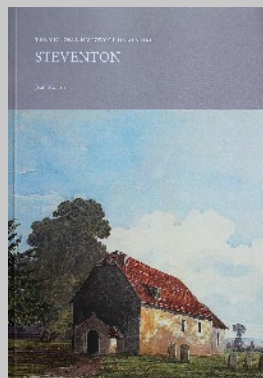
Bob Clarke



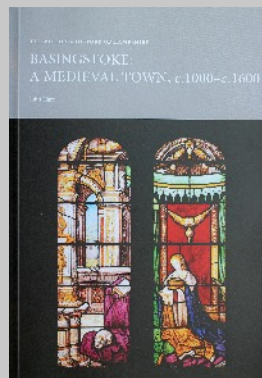
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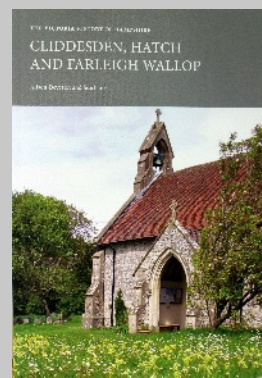
Mapledurwell



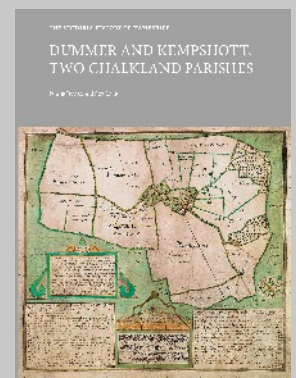
Steventon



Basingstoke: a
Medieval Town



Cliddesden, Hatch
and Farleigh Wallop



Dummer and
Kempshott, Two
Chalkland Parishes

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