

Carleton University
Learning in Retirement – Fall 2019

JANE AUSTEN'S ENGLAND

Instructor:
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Thursdays 1:30-3:30pm
124 Leeds House

The world of the English gentry that Jane Austen so brilliantly and delightfully depicted has fascinated generations of readers. In this series, we will look at the history behind the fiction. How have historians thought about the world of the “Long Eighteenth Century” (1750-1850) in England? How have Austen’s novels shaped our perceptions? What did they omit? And how do the many film adaptations of her work contribute to our ideas? No knowledge of Austen’s work is necessary, and the lectures/discussions will approach the subject from the viewpoint of an historian, not that of a literary specialist.

September 12: Miss Austen, Pre- and Posthumously

A brief introduction to Jane Austen, her writing, and the life that she and her works have taken on in subsequent generations. We will look at the relationship between her novels, the screen adaptations, and our ideas about English history that they have generated.

September 19: Two In-laws and Two Revolutions

Jane Austen’s sisters-in-law Eliza and Anne had direct connections to the two great revolutions of the 18th century, bringing the wider world of desperate politics into the quiet life of the parsonage. Revolution changed England in profound and unexpected ways.

September 26: Brothers Frank, Charles, and the Problem of Empire

Two of Jane Austen’s brothers were officers in the Royal Navy; their careers illustrate the growing place of England in the wider world and the debates that accompanied the emergence of an empire.

October 3: Brother James and Religious Anxieties

The Reverend James Austen provides us with a starting point for an exploration of the great upheavals in religion and philosophy that swirled around the Austens and the British.

October 10: Brother George and the Lives of the Less Fortunate

The Austens faced a terrible choice because of a handicapped son. What did the British think about illness, poverty, and the obligations of Christians to deal with social problems?

October 17: Sister Cassandra and the Place for Women

We will conclude with an examination of the place of women, the role of the family, and the emerging debate about both.

Some suggestions for further reading:

Roy and Lesley Adkins, *Jane Austen's England: Daily Life in the Georgian and Regency Periods* (Penguin, 2013)

Diane Atkinson, *The Criminal Conversation of Mrs. Norton* (Preface/Random House, 2012). A fascinating study of the women whose cases changed married women's rights laws in England.

J.C.D. Clark, *English Society, 1660-1832* (Cambridge University Press, 2nd edition, 2000). A scholarly and complex study of the role of religion, law, and the monarchy and aristocracy in shaping England.

Clive Emsley, *Britain and the French Revolution* (Longman, 2000). A short textbook introduction.

N.A.M. Roger, *The Wooden World* (various editions and reprints). Everything you ever wanted to know about the Royal Navy in Georgian times (and a few things you had no idea that you wanted to know).

Ann Stott, *Wilberforce: Family and Friends* (Oxford University Press, 2012). A study of the anti-slavery movement, the evangelical circle that supported it, and the family at the centre of it.

E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Penguin, 1st published 1963 with many subsequent editions). The classic analysis of the emergence of a working class in the years 1780-1832.

Lucy Worsley, *Jane Austen at Home: A Biography* (St. Martin's Press, 2017)

Some interesting websites:

Jane Austen Society of North America:

<http://jasna.org/>

University of London podcasts on the Long Eighteenth Century:

<https://www.history.ac.uk/podcasts/british-history-long-18th-century>

British History On-line (an extensive digital library of primary and secondary sources):

<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/>

History Today (UK's leading periodical of history for a general audience). While subscriptions are required for full access, there is a considerable amount available for free, and the illustrations are fun, too:

<https://www.historytoday.com/>