

IN AUSTEN FAMILY FOOTSTEPS

A Circular Walk in Tonbridge

JANE AUSTEN was born at Steventon in Hampshire on the 16th December 1775 to GEORGE and CASSANDRA Austen

George Austen was born in Tonbridge in 1731 and there are many family links to the town



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'A Gentleman and Lady travelling from Tunbridge towards . . . the Sussex Coast . . .'
Jane Austen, Sanditon, 1817

In the 18th Century Tonbridge, then spelled 'Tunbridge', was a market town at the Medway river crossing, dominated by a Norman Castle. The High Street was part of the second most important road in Kent, linking London to the flourishing spa town of Tunbridge Wells and to the Sussex coast, Rye and Hastings.

1. The Castle



Francis Austen, great-great-nephew of Jane Austen being filmed in front of the Castle in 2009

From the Civil War in the 17th Century to the early 19th Century we can trace members of Jane Austen's family living in Tonbridge.

The Castle comes into the Austen family story in the 17th Century when it was leased by **Jane's great-great-great-grandfather** THOMAS WELLER.

Take a few moments to walk around the Castle lawn and surrounding walkway looking down at the River Medway and across to the tower of the Church of St Peter and St Paul. This part of Tonbridge, north of the river, is the part that we will explore for Austen connections.

Climb the steep path to the Castle Motte for an even better view.

In 1739 JOHN HOOKER owned the Castle which later passed to his son THOMAS HOOKER. **Jane's father's first cousin** the Revd HENRY AUSTEN married MARY HOOKER, Thomas's sister, in 1743. The Hookers used stone from the ruined walls of the Castle to build a 'handsome stone mansion' which we can see next to the gatehouse.

When you have time, come back to visit the museum in the Castle Gatehouse.

Make your way across the Castle lawn, through the Gatehouse, and follow the path which keeps the Cannon on your right hand side. Bear round to your left (past the public loos) on Castle Street with the old Fire Station on your left. Opposite you will find the building which was Tonbridge's Workhouse ('Poor House') now Warners Solicitors. Cross the road into Bank Street and find the Corn Exchange on your left. Where Bank Street joins the High Street there is a new development on the old Market called Wellington Place.

2. 5 Bank Street

Land behind 5 Bank Street is believed to have been the home of **Jane's grandparents** WILLIAM and REBECCA AUSTEN.

Although the exact location is uncertain, documents indicate that the Austen family definitely owned property in this area.

In 1728 William married his first wife REBECCA, née HAMPSON, widow of WILLIAM WALTER. William Walter was probably educated at Tonbridge School.

William Austen was a surgeon during his married life. William and Rebecca's children were HAMPSON, who died at two years of age, **GEORGE, Jane's father**, and her **two aunts** LEONORA and PHILADELPHIA. Rebecca died in 1732.

In 1736 William married SUSANNA KELK but he died in 1737. Susanna continued to live in the marital home but did not care for her stepchildren who were sent to live with relatives. William, Rebecca and Susanna together with Hampson are buried in one grave in the Church of St Peter and St Paul. **GEORGE** inherited land in the Slade area through his stepmother.

Very close by is 180 High Street.

Continue walking past 174 High Street until you come to 180 High Street

3. 180 and 182 High Street



The two properties in the early 19th Century.

By kind permission of Tonbridge Historical Society

THE REVD HENRY AUSTEN, **cousin of GEORGE, (Jane's father)**, and his family lived in 182, then known as Fosse Bank. We know that Jane's **parents** and her **brother**, FRANCIS, visited them there in 1783. When Henry eventually vacated 182, it has been suggested that he moved to the smaller 180. 182 was later demolished and replaced by offices.

Continue just up the road to Blair House.

4. Blair House, 186 High Street



This is a house of medieval origin where THOMAS AUSTEN, **Jane's great-uncle**, an apothecary, lived when married to ELIZABETH BURGESS. Their son was Henry (see above). When Thomas died he was buried in the Church of St Peter and St Paul but no memorial remains to him. In later years this building was known as The Star and the White Horse Inn.

Continue walking up the High Street, crossing the road at Lansdowne Road. Carry on until you reach Tonbridge School.

5. Tonbridge School



GEORGE'S cousin, Henry Austen, was the first of the Austens to be educated here from 1734. **GEORGE, Jane's father**, aged ten, joined Tonbridge School in 1741 when Henry was head boy. In 1747 **GEORGE** went to Oxford University and, after being ordained, came back to Tonbridge to teach at his old school until 1757. It was at Oxford that he met CASSANDRA LEIGH, **Jane's mother**.



You will see a plaque on the wall of the Cawthorn Lecture Theatre (situated at the front of the school) commemorating **GEORGE'S** time there. The plaque is placed there as **JAMES CAWTHORN** was the headmaster who chose **GEORGE** for the position of Second Master.



Old Judde House
C. 1740-50

By kind permission of
Tonbridge
Historical Society

As you leave the Cawthorn Theatre you will see Old Judde House on your left

Old Judde was in existence in c.1740-50. It was not part of the school until 1825 but **GEORGE** would have walked past it.

The impressive red brick building opposite the school is Ferox Hall. Cross the road at the pedestrian crossing

6. Ferox Hall



This property is now part of Tonbridge School and, like Old Judde, **GEORGE** would have known this building.

When the CHILDREN family lived in Ferox Hall the owner, JOHN, cut his initials and the date 1755 on either side of the front door. John married JANE WELLER so the Children family was related to the Austens through this Weller connection. GEORGE, son of John and Jane, had a laboratory built behind the house for his only son JOHN GEORGE who was a man of science and friend of Sir Humphry Davy. They were involved in setting up the Tonbridge Gunpowder Company in 1811.

Jane jokingly refers to John George in a letter to her sister "Mr Children's two sons are both going to be married, John and George. They are to have one wife between them." There are memorials to the Children family in the Church of St Peter and St Paul.

Carry on walking on the same side of the road turning left into Bordyke

7. Chauntlers



Chauntlers was a large property now divided into two: The Priory and The Red House. It belonged to the WELLER family from the time of the Civil War and so was where Jane's **great-grandmother**, ELIZABETH WELLER was brought up. Elizabeth married JOHN AUSTEN IV, who, at his untimely death in 1704, left her with seven young children and such considerable debts that she sold everything she could to pay them off. It appears she was given no help by the Wellers and the only help the Austens gave was to take her eldest son into their care. Elizabeth's philosophy was that if she could give her sons education they would have a good chance of doing well in life. Elizabeth took the job of housekeeper at Sevenoaks School in return for her five sons receiving education there. By studying the progress of her sons we can see the trickle-down effect this had on **Jane Austen**.

Retrace your steps to the pedestrian crossing at the junction with the High Street, cross Bordyke and continue along the High Street, turning left into Church Lane.

8. Church of St Peter and St Paul



This church has been at the heart of Tonbridge for around 900 years. There is a guide book and audio guide to the very important monuments in our story. All the people mentioned in this guide would have worshipped here and there are several memorials in the North Aisle. William, **Jane's grandfather**, is buried with his first wife, Rebecca, and their first child, Hampson, who died at two years old. William's second wife, Susanna, who outlived him is also buried here. The gravestone is covered by a carpet for preservation but you will find a photograph of the inscription on the adjacent wall.

GEORGE, Jane's father, and his brother and sisters were christened here. Copies of relevant entries from the parish register are to be seen in a display case in the entrance to the church along with other memorabilia. A list of vicars at the back of the church includes the name of Revd JOHN PAPILLON (vicar 1791-1802). He was later Rector of Chawton during **Jane's** time there and it was a running joke in the Austen family for many years that **Jane** would marry him but it never happened.

When you leave the church turn left and continue through the churchyard past the little row of cottages in Church Street. Powells is the white house opposite the end of Church Street in East Street.

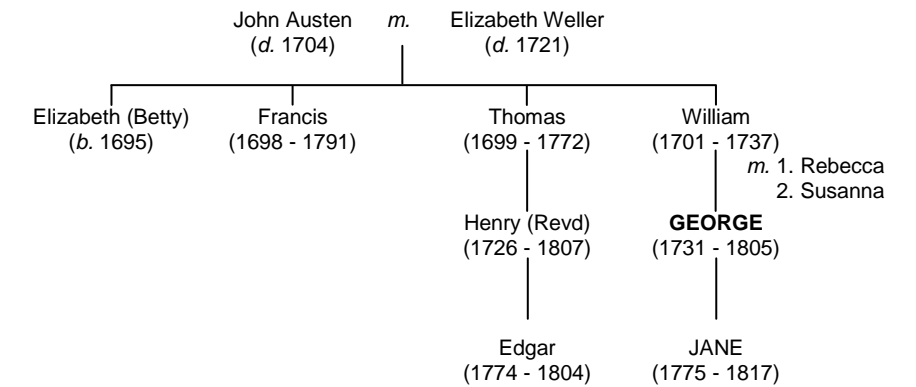
9. Powells now Lyons



This was the marital home of Elizabeth Weller's eldest child ELIZABETH (BETTY). She married GEORGE HOOPER, a Tonbridge lawyer. Their son, GEORGE, is commemorated in the church. Betty's father-in-law gave Tonbridge a fire engine which was housed in the church porch where you can see two fire hooks which were used for pulling the thatch off the houses. **Jane's father, GEORGE**, came to live with them here after his father's death.

To return to the Castle turn right in front of Powells, walk to the High Street, cross at the pedestrian crossing, turn right and walk up Castle Street. The Castle is on your left.

A family tree of the Austens who are mentioned in this pamphlet



Margaret Wilson's book 'Jane Austen's family and Tonbridge' is highly recommended for further reading



Enjoying the Walk with Mr Darcy and Lizzie Bennett

For the production of this walk thanks go to Margaret Wilson and Deirdre Le Faye of the Jane Austen Society and Mark Ballard of the Kent Archives Service