

Zoom Talk: Jane Austen

Delivered on: 11th November 2020

Haywards Heath & District Probus Club

Given By: Rupert Matthews



Jane Austen

Members of the Haywards Heath & District Probus Club and others were treated to a splendid talk via Zoom by historian Rupert Matthews on 11th November 2020 - fittingly Remembrance Day as the talk was titled '*Jane Austen and the Military*'.

About Jane Austen



Jane Austen was an English novelist known primarily for her six major novels, which interpret, critique and comment upon the British landed gentry at the end of the 18th century. Her books, set among the English middle and upper classes, are notable for their wit, social observation and insights into the lives of early 19th century women. Her plots often explore the dependence of women on marriage in the pursuit of favourable social standing and economic security. She uses biting irony, along with her realism, humour, and social commentary, which have long earned her acclaim among critics, scholars, and popular audiences alike.

Picture Credit: "[Jane Austen sculpture at Winchester Cathedral \(2\)](#)" by [Jayembee69](#) is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

Jane Austen's Major Novels

The BBC History website ([here](#)) summarises the novels:

"[Jane Austen's] first novel, '*Sense and Sensibility*', appeared in 1811. Her next novel '*Pride and Prejudice*', which she described as her "own darling child" received highly favourable reviews. '*Mansfield Park*' was published in 1814, then '*Emma*' in 1816. '*Emma*' was dedicated to the prince regent, an admirer of her work. All of Jane Austen's novels were published anonymously. In 1816, Jane began to suffer from ill-health, probably due to Addison's disease. She travelled to Winchester to receive treatment and died there on 18 July 1817. Two more novels, '*Persuasion*' and '*Northanger Abbey*' were published posthumously, and a final novel was left incomplete."

Three stand-out topics mentioned in Rupert Matthews' talk were:

- Colonel Fitzwilliam and the '*Purchase System*' (from *Pride and Prejudice*)
- Frederick Wentworth and '*Prize Money*' (from *Persuasion*)
- The Enigma of Admiral Croft (from *Persuasion*)

Pride and Prejudice: An overview

This romantic novel set in rural England in the early 19th century, was published anonymously in three volumes in 1813 and has become a classic of English literature. It centres on the turbulent relationship between Elizabeth Bennet, the daughter of a country squire, and Fitzwilliam Darcy, a rich aristocratic landowner. Elizabeth Bennet's mother attempts to persuade her husband to visit Mr. Bingley, a rich bachelor recently arrived in the neighbourhood. The reluctant Mr. Bennet visited Mr. Bingley's rented home (Netherfield) and somewhat out of the blue, an invitation to a ball to which the entire neighbourhood were to be invited, arrives. At the ball, we meet Mr. Darcy, Mr Bingley's dearest friend. At first, Mr. Darcy appears attracted to Elizabeth's elder sister, Jane.

Mr. Bingley's sisters, Caroline and Louisa later invite Jane to Netherfield for dinner. Catching a bad cold, Jane Bennet is forced to stay there to recover and is later visited by Elizabeth. Mr. Darcy is attracted to Elizabeth who seems oblivious to Mr Darcy's interest in her. Elizabeth is then pursued by a dashing and charming army officer, George Wickham. Wickham was an outsider and lived on credit. Although depicted as a charming person, Jane Austen gives enough clues for the reader to realise that Wickham is not what he appears to be at all.

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Elizabeth's dislike of Mr. Darcy and his love for Elizabeth are growing in equal measure. When Mr. Darcy proposes to Elizabeth, declaring his ardent love for her despite her low social connections, she rejects him angrily, stating she could never love a man who caused her sister unhappiness and further accuses him of treating Wickham unjustly. But sometime later, upon learning the truth about Mr. Darcy, when she is again asked for her hand in marriage, she accepts. The novel concludes with an overview of the marriages of the three daughters and the great satisfaction of both parents at the fine, happy matches made by Jane and Elizabeth.

Persuasion: An Overview

The main character of the novel, Anne Elliot, is a 27-year-old 'spinster' who is intelligent and warm. Her father, Sir Walter Elliot, although a baronet and holder of a hereditary title, finds himself in dire financial straits and in risk of losing their home, Kellynch Hall. The story begins seven years after the broken engagement of Anne Elliot to the then Commander Frederick Wentworth. Anne, then 19 years old, had fallen in love and accepted a proposal of marriage from the dashing young naval officer. Wentworth was considered clever, confident, ambitious, and employed, but his low social status made Anne's friends and family view the Commander as an unfavourable husband and no match for an 'Elliot of Kellynch Hall' (the family estate). Anne is persuaded to break off the engagement.

Several years later, the Elliot family were in financial trouble, so they let Kellynch Hall, and decided to settle in Bath until finances improved. Lady Anne Russell, by then the widow of the late Sir Henry Russell, lived near Kellynch Hall, the family seat of the Elliot family. She was extremely good friends with the late Lady Elliot and admitted she was wrong about Wentworth and befriends the new couple and they marry at last, and Anne settles into life as the wife of a Navy captain.

Learning More about Jane Austen and the Military

You may want to find out more about the subject of this talk. Listed below are some books to purchase and some places to visit - one of them might even make for a nice coach trip for readers of *Nil Desperandum*.

The following books are available on Amazon or from bookshops:

- *Jane Austen at Home* by Lucy Worsley ISBN-13: 978-1473632202
- *Jane Austen – A Life* by Claire Tomalin ISBN-13: 978-0241963272
- *Jane Austen's Letters* edited by Deirdre Faye ISBN-13: 978-0198704492
- *The Complete Novels of Jane Austen* ISBN-13 979-8618964654

You can order books written by Rupert Matthews from his website at: <https://rupertmatthews.com/buy-books>

Places to Visit

Jane Austen's House: Winchester Road, Chawton, Hampshire. GU34 1SD. This is the house where Jane Austen lived and wrote. It was here that Jane's genius flourished and it's where she wrote, revised and had published all her novels.

<https://janeaustens.house/>

The Jane Austen Centre: 40 Gay Street, Bath, Somerset. BA1 2NT

The Jane Austen Centre showcases life during Regency times and explores how living in this magnificent city affected Jane Austen and her writing. Guides dressed in Regency costume, period decoration throughout and exhibits bring visitors closer to Jane Austen. The centre also organises the Jane Austen Festival. <https://janeausten.co.uk/>

About the Speaker



Rupert Matthews is an established public speaker, school visitor, history consultant and author of non-fiction books, magazine articles and newspaper columns. His work has been translated into 28 languages (including Sioux). You can look him up at: <https://rupertmatthews.com/> 07721 455944