

Jane Austen (16 December 1775 – 18 July 1817)

Dawlish and Sidmouth



Jane Austen's books, set among the middle and upper classes, are notable for their wit, social observation and insights into the lives of early 19th century women.

There were 6 sons and 2 daughters in the close-knit Austen family. Cassandra (the elder sister) and Jane were particularly close. After being sent away for private tuition, where she nearly died of Typhus, her education was completed at home and she began to write as a teenager.

Jane's brother Henry helped her negotiate with a publisher and her 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, which was dedicated to the prince regent, an admirer of her work. All were published anonymously.

Jane, with Cassandra and their parents, visited Sidmouth in 1801. 'Sidmouth,' she had written in a letter to Cassandra in January of that year, 'is now talked of as our summer abode.' They chose Sidmouth at the request of a former pupil of Mr Austen, the Rev. Richard Buller, vicar at nearby Colyton. It was at Sidmouth that Jane is reputed to have met and fallen in love with a young clergyman. Having gained the permission of the family to continue the friendship later, he died suddenly. Jane gives Sidmouth only one very brief mention in one novel, *Persuasion*. "Mr Elliot had been in Sidmouth before coming to Lyme." In 1802 Jane spent a long holiday in Dawlish The guide book of 1810 lists the library among the excellent amenities offered by Dawlish; but in a letter to her niece, Anna, in 1814, Jane wrote 'the library was particularly pitiful and wretched twelve years ago'.

Austen rejected suitor Harris Bigg Wither at the last minute and never married, but still she expresses a keen grasp of the traditional female role and the ensuing hopes and heartbreaks with her memorable protagonists, including Emma Woodhouse, Fanny Price, Catherine Morland, Anne Elliot, and Elizabeth Bennett of *Pride and Prejudice*. 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, eventually titled *Sanditon*, was left incomplete.

