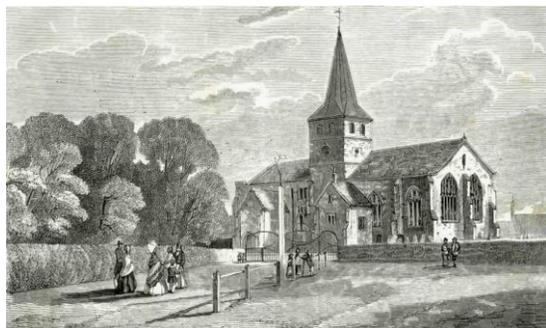


JANE AUSTEN frequently walked the two kilometres to Alton from Chawton, where she lived from 1809 to 1817 with her mother and sister Cassandra. Diaries and letters record shopping expeditions, doctor's appointments and even the fun of the Fair in this small market town, before the return along the muddy lanes to the village. Chawton House was the home of her brother, Edward. Two other brothers lived in Alton for a time, and Jane visited them and their relations, the Digweeds and the Lefroys, whose children's christenings are recorded in our Registers of Baptism.



**St Lawrence Church in early 1800s**

Jane must surely have known St. Lawrence Church. Her brother Henry (who left the army to be a banker in Alton's High Street) took Holy Orders in 1816 and became a curate at Chawton. We learn that he officiated at St. Lawrence in 1817 and 1818. Their brother James was also a clergyman, succeeding his father as rector of Steventon, a Hampshire parish, so Jane

wrote about the Anglican Church with inside knowledge.



**Jane Austen, from 1870 woodcut after sketch by her sister Cassandra**  
courtesy Jane Austen Memorial Trust

Readers of Jane Austen will know how amusingly she mocks the clergy in her novels. They are sycophantic, unctuous and snobbish. We receive few impressions of spirituality or pastoral care. She exaggerated, of course, and it is worth remembering that curates then were often impoverished, and dependent on patronage for preferment.



**St Lawrence Church from south west**  
Photo courtesy of Robin Handley

The institutional Church of the time was anxious to encourage social stability after the upheavals in Church and State of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Its clergy preached decency and obedience to authority, rather than intense personal commitment.

Similarly, Jane Austen's sharpest satire is for those who hurt others through self-indulgence and thoughtless stupidity, while she praises forbearance, civility and self-restraint: virtues which encourage harmony and good order. Nevertheless, her most popular heroines tend to engage with life independently, learning to make intelligent and honest judgements about the people around them and about their own moral conduct. Perhaps they represented something of Jane herself.

Distressing illness, which even her trusted Alton Doctor Curtis could not cure, led Jane to Winchester, where she lived briefly in College Street until her early death in July, 1817. She is buried in the Cathedral, the centre of our Diocese. Her memorial in the north aisle commends “the benevolence of her heart, the sweetness of her temper and the extraordinary endowments of her mind”.



**Jane Austen's desk**

Photo: courtesy Jane Austen Memorial Trust

### **Recommended reading:**

*The novels of Jane Austen.*

*'The Parish Church of St. Lawrence, Alton'.*  
A Guide Book which describes the church and its history.

*'Jane Austen and Alton',* by Jane Hurst.  
A guide to the Alton which Jane knew. Available from the Allen Gallery in Church St and the Little Green Dragon bookshop, in Normandy Street just south-east of the church.

*'Jane Austen: A life'* by Claire Tomalin, pub. Viking. A good biography which focuses on setting Jane Austen in her historical period and describing the Hampshire of her day.

### **Places to visit.**

*The Curtis Museum,* on Crown Hill, Alton.

*The village of Chawton,* south-west of Alton. Jane's house and garden are open to the public and are full of interest. In the churchyard you can see the family graves. Chawton House is now a study centre, specialising in early women writers. (Readership must be formally requested.)

*Winchester.* There is a plaque on Jane Austen's final home in College Street, and her memorial in the Cathedral is easily found, and is usually graced by a fresh posy of flowers.



## **Jane Austen and St Lawrence Church, Alton**

**St Lawrence Church in  
The Parish of The Resurrection,  
Alton**