

# JANE AUSTEN'S WINCHESTER

DISCOVER THE CITY AS THE AUTHOR KNEW IT

## THE AUSTEN FAMILY'S BOOKSELLER

It seems fitting that literature should have remained close to Jane during her final weeks. Both her father and brother kept an account with John Burdon, 'gentleman bookseller', who traded on the south side of College Street from 1757 to 1803.



College Street, FJ Balgont, 1838

The bookshop and stationers now known as P&G Wells **7** has operated under various owners since 1729, making it one of the longest unbroken records of trading in the country.

Books purchased here had a profound impact on Jane, including the works of one of her favourite poets, William Cowper. They make several appearances in her novels: "Does it not make you think of Cowper?", Fanny Price exclaims in Mansfield Park.

Behind the shop front installed by P&G Wells with assistance from Winchester College in 1891, the interior retains much of its original Georgian furniture, including bookshelves, drawers, printing presses and a bookbinder's workbench.

## A MOURNFUL PROCESSION

*"I watched the little mournful procession the length of the Street & when it turned from my sight & I had lost her for ever... Never was human being more sincerely mourned by those who attended her remains than was this dear creature."*



Gate to the Cathedral Close, George Shepherd, 1828

– A letter from Cassandra Austen to Fanny Knight, July 1817

Cassandra watched Jane's coffin leave College Street from the window of No. 8. Women did not customarily attend funerals at this time, so the procession consisted of three of the Austen brothers, and Jane's nephew, James Edward.

The journey to Winchester Cathedral would not have been too different from the route you walk today. At the end of College Street, turn right to face Kingsgate **8**. It was at this point that Cassandra would have lost sight of Jane's funeral procession.

Continue through the gateway and turn right to go through Prior's Gate **9** towards The Close **10**.

## FINAL RESTING PLACE

*"Her dear remains are to be deposited in the Cathedral—it is a satisfaction to me to think that they are to lie in a building she admired so much"*

– A letter from Cassandra Austen to Fanny Knight, July 1817

Within The Close **10**, you will find a statue of Jane Austen by Martin Jennings, which was unveiled in October 2025 to mark the 250th anniversary of Jane Austen's birth. While there are no uncontested portraits of Jane, this authoritative figure standing next to a writing table aims to capture the strength of her literary legacy.

Nearby No. 11 Cathedral Close **11** was the home of Elizabeth Heathcote, where Jane and Cassandra stayed during a trip to Winchester in 1814.

Walk through Curle's Passage to the west face of Winchester Cathedral **12**. Jane was buried here on the morning of 24 July 1817, in the north nave aisle.

The memorial stone placed upon the grave has words composed by her brother, Henry Austen, and pays tribute to "the extraordinary endowments of her mind". In 1869 Jane's nephew published *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, the proceeds of which paid for a brass plaque to be installed on the wall near her tomb.

Many wonder why Jane, who did not rise to personal fame during her lifetime, came to be laid to rest inside Winchester Cathedral. She died in the parish of St Swithun, which entitled her to burial in the Cathedral precinct. It is thought that perhaps the family's connection to the church was a contributing factor to her burial within. Jane's father and two of her brothers were clergymen with close connections in the Winchester diocese, and the family ran in many of the same circles as the cathedral's Dean and Chapter. Her social standing is therefore the most likely case.



## GEORGIAN WINCHESTER

Leave the cathedral and follow the avenue of lime trees diagonally right towards City Museum **13**, which houses two purses and a personalised spool case belonging to Jane.

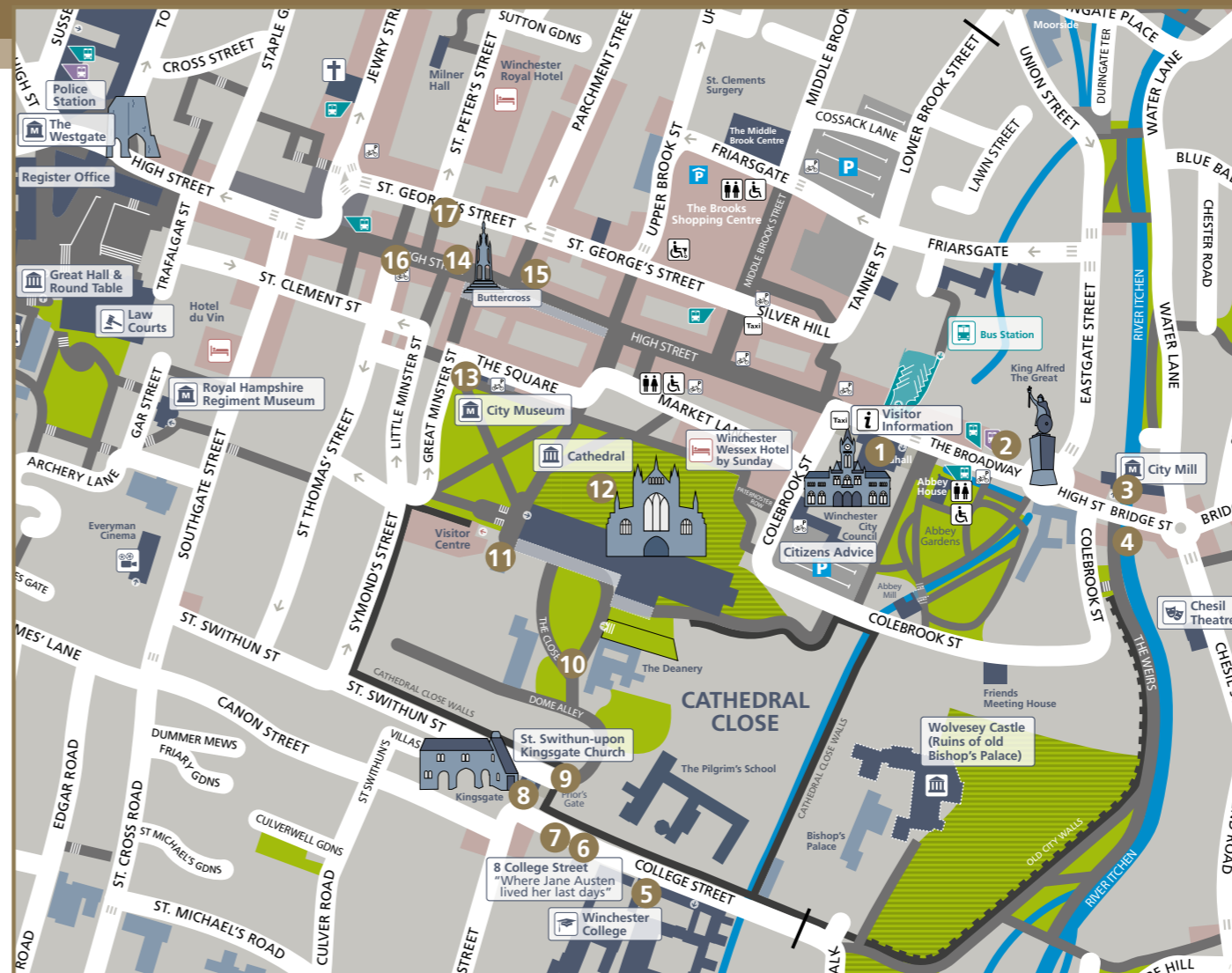
As you enter the High Street, you will be able to spot many buildings surviving from the Winchester Jane knew.

To the right of the Buttercross **14** is The Pentice **15**, a row of buildings with a covered walkway. The closest building was once the prominent Woolridge family's solicitors at the time of Jane's final weeks in Winchester.

Looking up the street to the left of the Buttercross, you will see the Town Clock **16**, which was gifted to the old Guildhall in 1713. The bell rings at 8pm each evening, a tradition dating back to the Middle Ages. Jane's maternal cousin James Henry Leigh was elected MP for Winchester here in 1818.

Across from the old Guildhall is 105 High Street **17**, now Natwest Bank. The building is in the Adam style, popular in Georgian architecture. It was built in 1772 for apothecary George Earl; he later became Mayor of Winchester in 1790, 1800 and 1804.

The artist George Shepherd painted many watercolours of Winchester in the early 19th century. His 1820s painting of the High Street is featured on the cover of this trail, providing a remarkable insight into the city as Jane knew it.



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Learn more about Winchester's literary connections with our Keats Trail, available to download from

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Winchester City Council

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VISIT WINCHESTER

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*"I am going to Winchester... for some weeks to see what Mr Lyford can do farther towards re-establishing me in tolerable health."*

– A letter from Jane Austen to Anne Sharp, May 1817

Jane Austen was born in 1775 and spent her early years in the village of Steventon, where her father served as the local rector. In 1801, at the age of 25, she moved with her parents and sister Cassandra to Bath following her father's retirement. After George Austen's death in 1805, Jane, her mother, and her sister returned to Hampshire, living briefly in Southampton before settling permanently in Chawton in 1809.

It was in the Chawton cottage, now open to the public as Jane Austen's House, that she wrote all six of her celebrated novels. The Hampshire landscape and the society in which she moved provided inspiration for her writing.

By 1817, Jane's health had worsened, prompting her move to Winchester for treatment under Dr. Giles Lyford. She and Cassandra lodged at No. 8 College Street, where Jane died just eight weeks later, aged 41. She was buried in Winchester Cathedral. Today, traces of Georgian Winchester still reflect the city she once knew. Explore notable Georgian buildings, walk in Jane's footsteps and discover the people and places that marked her final weeks.

## GEORGIAN ASSEMBLIES

*"It would surely be much more rational if conversation instead of dancing were made the order of the day."*

*"Much more rational, my dear Caroline, I dare say, but it would not be near so much like a ball."*

– Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*

The trail starts at the Winchester Visitor Information Centre **1**.

From here, you can see the white stucco façade of St John's House **2** and the 13th century chapel. The location has been home to charitable institution, St John's Hospital, since AD 935.

In 1751, Member of Parliament for Winchester, George Brydges, left a legacy of £800 for improvements to St John's House. The money was used to create a large hall above the infirmaries, serving as an Assembly Room during Jane's life. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the Assembly Room was the social hub of Winchester, hosting feasts, theatricals, balls, and musical performances from the likes of Paganini and Liszt.



## WORK AND LEISURE

*"I had not proposed doing more than cross the Itchen yesterday, but it proved so pleasant, and so much to the satisfaction of all, that when we reached the middle of the stream we agreed to be rowed up the river."*

– A letter from Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, October 1808

Continue along the Broadway, past King Alfred's statue, until you reach National Trust's Winchester City Mill **3**. From the nearby City Bridge **4**, pictured above, you can stand in the spot where Joseph Mallord William Turner sketched the mill in 1795 when visiting the area while a student of the Royal Academy. His image is the earliest known depiction of the building. The current mill was built in 1744, but there is evidence that a mill has existed on the site since at least the 5th century.

The River Itchen originates in Cheriton, near Alresford, and travels through Winchester to Southampton in the south. By the 18th century, Winchester's primary economic asset was its water supply. Industries such as brewing, grain milling and silk milling employed several hundreds of the city's men, women and children.

Jane would often take boat trips along the River Itchen during her time living in Southampton between 1806 and 1809. From the Austen family's Castle Street lodgings, they would catch the Itchen Ferry and cross the river to Northam or Netley. She playfully describes this crossing in a letter as "a little water party".

## HEROES, LEGISLATORS, FOOLS, AND VILLAINS

Following the city walls, turn right into College Street where you will find Winchester College **5**. Eight of Jane's nephews were pupils at Winchester College and it is often mentioned in her letters.

From the cottage in Chawton where she lived from 1809, now open to the public as Jane Austen's House, Jane wrote of the procession of carriages driving past, filled with young Wykehamists on their way to London for the summer holidays:

*"We saw a countless number of post-chaises full of boys pass by yesterday morning – full of future heroes, legislators, fools, and villains."*

– A letter from Jane Austen to James Edward Austen, July 1816

At the time when Jane and Cassandra were lodging in College Street, only her nephew Charles Knight was a pupil. He was one of 133 'commoners' (fee-paying pupils) at the school in 1817. The rest were 'scholars' who were supported financially to attend the school and lived in far less comfort.

Both commoners and scholars were subject to rigorous routine and discipline, to the extent that a pupil uprising occurred in 1818. A group of boys, Charles Knight among them, seized the keys and took control of the school before being apprehended by soldiers. While he was not one of the 30 pupils expelled after this rebellion, he was treated to stern words from the Austen family for the "folly and impropriety of his behaviour".



**5** Winchester College, Daniel Havell, 1816

## JANE'S FINAL WEEKS

Next to the Headmaster's House stands No. 8 College Street **6**, where Jane lodged with her sister Cassandra for the final weeks of her life. The house was secured by a friend from her Steventon days, Elizabeth Heathcote, who lived in the Cathedral Close. Jane's doctor, Mr Lyford, lived on the nearby St Thomas Street.

*"Our Lodgings are very comfortable. We have a neat little drawing room with a bow-window overlooking Dr Gabell's Garden."*

– A letter from Jane Austen to James Edward Austen, May 1817

Jane's days at No. 8 College Street were spent under the care of Cassandra and her sister-in-law Mary Lloyd. Many visitors passed through the doors of No. 8, Charles Knight and Mrs Heathcote among them.



Henry Gabell, Headmaster of Winchester College from 1810 to 1823, Unknown Artist

On 15 July, three days before her death, Jane dictated her final verses to Cassandra: a comical poem about the Winchester horse races being rained upon by a vengeful St Swithun. By that evening, Jane's health had declined and Cassandra became "hopeless of a recovery". Jane died on the morning of 18 July 1817, with her head resting on Cassandra's lap.

*"I have lost a treasure, such a sister, such a friend as never can have been surpassed. She was the sun of my life, the gilder of every pleasure, the soother of every sorrow. I had not a thought concealed from her, and it is as if I had lost a part of myself."*

– A letter from Cassandra Austen to Fanny Knight, July 1817

Learn more about Jane's connections in Hampshire with our Jane Austen's Hampshire Trail, available to download from

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**2** St John's House, George Shepherd, 1826