



# Thatcham Historical Society

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24<sup>th</sup> November 2008

## A Trip to Jane Austens House Museum

By Nick Young

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Members of Thatcham Historical Society visited the Jane Austen House Museum on the 26<sup>th</sup> October. The trip was well attended and visitors were able to see some of the surroundings and materials seen and used by Jane Austen. The museum, a 17<sup>th</sup> Century house, is located in Chawton. The trip tied in with the talk Elizabeth Prodman gave to the society in September (read more about this later in the newsletter).

For more informaion about the museum, visit [www.jane-austens-house-museum.org.uk](http://www.jane-austens-house-museum.org.uk).



*The Jane Austen House Museum.*

*Photograph by Ann Allen.*

## News and Reviews

### Scenes of Crime

By Nick Young

Ken Wells from Thames Valley Police Museum gave a talk on "Scenes of Crime" on Monday 20th October. Mr Wells noted that the Thames Valley Police (TVP) force actually consists of 5 separate forces. Ken found his niche as a police officer in recording scenes of crime.

Recording these scenes involves many methods including fingerprints and DNA, but also photographing the scene which is what Mr Wells became involved with. Mr Wells noted that the fingerprint is perhaps still the single most important piece of evidence that can be collected from a crime scene, more so than DNA. Mr Wells then gave some background on fingerprints, highlighting that a person's fingerprints are established in the 28th week of pregnancy and are thereafter set for life. Indeed, a photograph was shown of a person who had removed layers of skin to hide his fingerprints. The skin grew back, along with the same fingerprints they had previously. Various techniques are used to lift fingerprints including aluminium powder, although there are far more advanced methods available today.

One other activity that Mr Wells was involved with was the mechanical fit. This is where items are found at the crime scene and matched, or not, with a suspect. This could be an imprint of a shoe, a broken tool or buttons. For example, part of a broken button at a crime scene may fit a item of clothing belonging to the suspect, which would prove the suspect was at the crime scene. However, a forensic scientist is needed to confirm this. Infrared photography is another tool that Mr Wells would have used. This was, and still is, used to see through parts of a document that have been blanked out and can even tell if alterations have been made.

A vote of thanks given by committee member Alf Wheeler.

### Jane Austen and her Hampshire family

By Nick Young

Elizabeth Proudman gave a talk on "*Jane Austen and her Hampshire family*" on Monday 29th September. Liz started by giving a brief background to Jane Austen noting that Jane was born in 1775 in Steventon and died in 1817 having never travelled abroad. Jane had therefore lived through various wars including the Napoleonic. Jane was the seventh of eight children. The house Jane was born in no longer exists, however, a water pump does still survive. As a child, Jane loved playing word games. The children also read to each other and wrote poems and rhymes.

At this time in history, when a baby was around 6 weeks old, they were put out to nurse for 18 to 24 months. Jane and her sister, Cassandra, went to the Abbey School in Reading. At the age of 11, Jane's family could no longer afford the school fees. A neighbour, Madam Anne Lefroy, became a mentor to Jane at this time.

It is known that Jane never married, however, she did have at least

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*"Thames Valley Police (TVP) force actually consists of 5 separate forces"*

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*"the fingerprint is perhaps still the single most important piece of evidence that can be collected from a crime scene"*

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*"Jane was born in 1775 in Steventon"*

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*Horse drawn carriage as used by Jane.  
Photograph by Ann Allen*

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*"Jane wrote 6 novels,  
which are amongst the  
most popular in the  
English language."*

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one love interest, Tom Lefroy. Tom was the nephew of Madam Anne Lefroy. He came to stay with his aunt for a Christmas holiday when Jane was 21. During this period he fell in love with Jane, but when his aunt found out, she sent Tom away never to see Jane again. Jane was engaged, although only for one night. She went to a ball with friends. That night when they came back one of her friends brother proposed to her and she accepted. The following day she declined the offer.

Jane would have read Shakespeare and Gilpin, amongst others. Gilpin invented the word "picturesque". Jane mocks him in some of her books. She wrote 3 books before she was 25, whilst in Steventon and published *Sense and Sensibility* at her own expense. She would have known this area, Berkshire and Hampshire, well and travelled the great west road often. Jane came from a class of society that could not afford good portraits and the only known portrait of Jane was made by her sister when Jane was between the ages of 30 to 35. Jane wrote 6 novels, which are amongst the most popular in the English language.

Jane's father, George, was a clergyman, originally a Yeoman from Kent. George's father was a barber surgeon. Her mother, Cassandra Leigh Austen, was the daughter of the Duke of Chandos. An aristocratic background, but no money was in the family. Cassandra was a down to earth lady and keen Gardner. She tried to get people to grow potatoes but had trouble as this was a crop seen as for use only by the gentry of the day. Some sources say that Jane did not get on with her mother; however, this is debatable as she lived with her mother until she died aged 41.

The family lived, for a time, in Bath at 4 Sydney Place. She did not write at all whilst in Bath though. Jane would have visited many of the local places including the assembly rooms. During this period, the families of the age would have gone on holiday in the summer as it was too hot in the city to keep food fresh. The family certainly visited Sidmouth and Lyme Regis. Jane's father died in 1805, whilst living in Bath, and the family had to find somewhere else to stay. That is Jane, Cassandra and their mother. They tried cheaper lodgings, places in Southampton and finally went to stay with Jane's brother, Edward. Edward was widowed and the offer to let his mother and sisters stay was also in his favour, to help him look after his 11 children. It is believed that Jane lived in at least 43 different places during her lifetime.



*A society member with some of the ovens  
from the period.  
Photograph by Ann Allen.*

Then in 1817 Jane became ill. She took lodgings in Winchester to be close to doctors, but died later that year. Women of the day were not allowed to attend funerals, and only 4 people turned up to pay their respects at her funeral, which had to be completed by 10.30am so that normal activities could continue.

A vote of thanks given by committee member Sue Broughton.

## Regulars

This section contains information and articles, which will be published every issue. If anyone has any suggestions, events, and publication details or would like to provide some input for an article, please do not hesitate to get in contact with us.

## Upcoming Events

7<sup>th</sup> October to 23<sup>rd</sup> December, **NFU 1908 to 2008: celebrating 100 years of the National Farmers Union**  
Museum of English Rural Life, Redlands Road, Reading  
 For more information visit [www.merl.org.uk](http://www.merl.org.uk), call 0118 378 8660 or email [merlevents@reading.ac.uk](mailto:merlevents@reading.ac.uk).

3<sup>rd</sup> December, **Military honours - curating the Battle of Britain Museum, RAF Uxbridge**, Hazel Crozier  
 Talk takes place on Wednesday from 1 to 2pm. Bring your lunch, and why not stay for a free guided tour of the Museum afterwards?

13<sup>th</sup> January 2009, **Hare Hatch**, Peter Johnson  
Wargrave Local History Society. Meetings are at 8 p.m. in The Hannen Room, Mill Green, Wargrave.  
 Peter was for many years the Farm Manager for Bear Place Farm, and will tell of aspects of the history of Hare Hatch, and the possible lines of local rivers in the area.

21<sup>st</sup> January 2009, **The South West Coastal Paths - a Legacy**, David Stubbs  
Hungerford Historical Association. Meetings 8.00pm in The Corn Exchange, Hungerford. For more information visit [www.hungerfordhistorical.org.uk](http://www.hungerfordhistorical.org.uk).

26<sup>th</sup> January 2009, **Annual General Meeting and Social Event**  
Thatcham Historical Society, 7.30pm (see back page for location details). Material shown at Thatcham festival of the arts will also be put on display.

27<sup>th</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> May, 2009, **People of the Thames: a photographic journey**  
Museum of English Rural Life, Redlands Road, Reading

### DECEMBER 2008

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### JANUARY 2009

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## Readers Enquiries

The society continually receives enquiries through various channels. This section is intended to help the society members who get such enquiries to provide more detailed replies. The enquirers contact details are kept private, unless permission has been given to make them public. All feedback will be passed back to the enquirer, acknowledging your input. Some success stories will be included in future newsletters. If you can possibly provide any help in responding to any of these enquiries, please contact Nick Young via email at [nick@thatchamhistoricalsociety.org.uk](mailto:nick@thatchamhistoricalsociety.org.uk).

### William Richard Petty

I am researching the death of my grandfather William Richard Petty who I understand was involved in a railway accident close to the Lino works in Thatcham in May or June 1932. He died in hospital on the 26th June 1932. He lived in Newbury and I believe he worked as an outside porter maybe for the Great Western railway at Newbury. My late father, who was aged nine at the time, didn't say much about the accident and I am interested to learn any info about it.

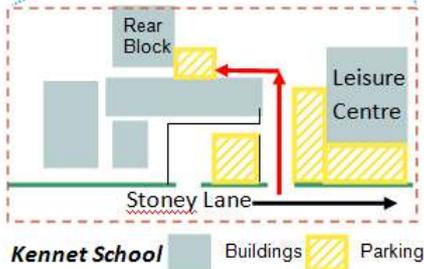
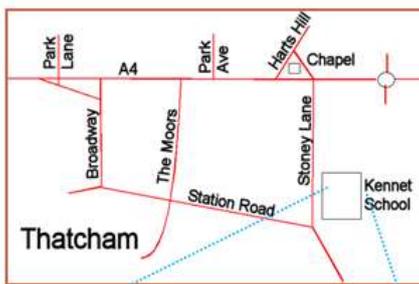
Many thanks in advance for your help.

Jon Petty

### Ames Crosta Engineering Co. Ltd.

Can you tell me where this firm was located in Thatcham in the 1920s? They had a wind powered sludge pump erected c1924 and I am trying to determine how long it survived. The wind powered unit was of a rather rare variety - the subject of some research over the last few years. Many thanks in anticipation.

**Additional.** We know the pump was located near the Kennet and Avon canal. The enquirer is more interested in the location of the pump.



## About the Thatcham Historical Society

The Society was formed in 1967, with the aim of promoting an interest in the local history of Thatcham and surrounding areas. In addition, more general historical matters are of interest to the society and its members. Members have differing levels of involvement with some carrying out research into topics with the intention of publishing their results and others just being content to enjoy the monthly speakers and activities. The meetings are held at the Kennet Secondary school:

Room E8/9, Rear Block  
Kennet School, Thatcham

## What we do

Our society exists to promote an interest, not only in the local history of Thatcham and district, but also in historical matters in general. One way we aim to do this is by arranging a regular series of talks by invited speakers throughout the year. We try to ensure that we have a wide range of subject matter in the talks by interpreting "historical" relevance very freely. Past talks have covered reports of visits to the ancient civilisations of the Middle East and South America, aspects of industrial, transport and agricultural history, as well as aspects of the local history of Thatcham and District. The latter, where possible, are given by speakers who are involved in local research. Most talks are illustrated by slides and some have given members a chance to identify (or guess at!) the purpose of certain historical artefacts from local collections.

We organise a day trip each summer to a place, which not only has strong historical associations, but also more general interest, since we invite member's friends and relations to join us. For instance Rochester, Bristol and Southampton have been visited in recent years. An afternoon guided tour of a local town or place of interest is often organised in the autumn.

## Projects

Another way in which we follow our aim is by initiating and encouraging research into the history of Thatcham and its surroundings. Currently we have a group working on the production of an index of maps covering Thatcham from the earliest available, indicating where they may be seen. Another group has recorded the inscriptions on Thatcham gravestones and is finishing recording those at Cold Ash. A further group has produced and published "*Thatcham over 2000 Years*", a chronology of events in Thatcham from the earliest times to the year 2000. Copies of this book are still available. Any member wishing to help in a project is always welcome, as are any suggestions for future research. Such involvement is of course entirely voluntary.

## Becoming a member

The annual subscription fee is currently £7. This allows you to attend all of the series of talks we arrange each year and includes refreshments at the meetings. It also includes the refreshments at our AGM and social evening. The costs of any excursions or visits would be extra. Visitors can also come along to any of our meetings at a cost of £1.50 per person per meeting. This also includes refreshments. If you are interested please come along to one of our meetings, you will be very welcome. You can join at any meeting, or just pay as a visitor.



Members and friends of Thatcham Historical Society arriving at Penrhyn Castle, 2006. Photo by Ann Allen.