



# Jane Austen's England

*Roy A. Adkins , Lesley Adkins*

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**A cultural snapshot of everyday life in the world of Jane Austen**

Jane Austen, arguably the greatest novelist of the English language, wrote brilliantly about the gentry and aristocracy of two centuries ago in her accounts of young women looking for love. *Jane Austen's England* explores the customs and culture of the real England of her everyday existence depicted in her classic novels as well as those by Byron, Keats, and Shelley. Drawing upon a rich array of contemporary sources, including many previously unpublished manuscripts, diaries, and personal letters, Roy and Lesley Adkins vividly portray the daily lives of ordinary people, discussing topics as diverse as birth, marriage, religion, sexual practices, hygiene, highwaymen, and superstitions.

From chores like fetching water to healing with medicinal leeches, from selling wives in the marketplace to buying smuggled gin, from the hardships faced by young boys and girls in the mines to the familiar sight of corpses swinging on gibbets, *Jane Austen's England* offers an authoritative and gripping account that is sometimes humorous, often shocking, but always entertaining.

## Jane Austen's England Details

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Author : Roy A. Adkins , Lesley Adkins

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# From Reader Review Jane Austen's England for online ebook

## Samantha says

'Jane Austen's England' is some of the most readable nonfiction that I have encountered. Lacking that textbook feel so common in nonfiction, this book draws the reader in, educating and entertaining at the same time. Jane Austen's novels tend to focus on the upper class in England near the turn of the 19th century, but this book broadens the reader's knowledge of the common person's experience living in Jane Austen's time.

Chapters are broken up into particular areas of life, such as childhood, work, health, fashion, religion and death. The author quotes innumerable sources for contemporary views on each topic. Some excerpts are humorous, others sorrowful. Each brings a little bit of the late 1700s and early 1800s to life.

This book also includes a series of helpful maps, index on weights and measures, a chronological overview, vast endnotes, and lengthy bibliography.

Though this book is not a biography of Jane Austen or completely focused on her work, lines from her novels are included as well as portions of letters that she wrote and other information about her life. Her insistence upon accuracy in her novels led to a very telling picture of a small section of society at the time. 'Jane Austen's England' gives us entrance into the rest of it.

Many Jane Austen fans will enjoy this book for its ability to place the reader inside her world. Others may be turned off by the reality of the common man that does not turn up much in her depictions of those with a set annual income. It is a must read for those interested in this era of history and a valuable resource for anyone writing about this period.

\* I received this book as an advance uncorrected proof copy from the publisher for review purposes.

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## QNPoohBear says

Jane Austen's England covers life in the Georgian era from birth to death. The authors use letters, diaries and other period sources to describe how the common people REALLY lived. Far from the genteel world of the drawing rooms of Jane Austen's novels, The England portrayed in this novel is dark, dirty, diseased and at times crude. The authors nicely balance "period drama" world that we love to romanticize with the world of the common people. They cover the lives of the gentry and the aristocrats but also explain the difficulties of trying to survive as a common working man or woman. The chapters cover everything from etiquette, advice and fashion to disease and death. I especially liked the extensive quotes from period sources to show that the authors did their own original research. At times this book was really slow and relied on quotes that were far too long. I knew a lot of this information already from reading other books about Jane Austen's life and times and also from blogs. I do feel I learned a lot though. The language is fairly accessible to non-scholars but the use of primary sources may be daunting to some. I would recommend this book to those who have a serious interest in learning more about Georgian England.

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## M. Langlinais says

3.5 stars. Informative and engagingly written. I'm sure it will be a great resource for me when I write my Regency/Georgian novels.

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## SmartBitches says

### Full review at Smart Bitches, Trashy Books

*Jane Austen's England: Daily Life in the Georgian and Regency Periods* is a great resource for fans of Austen who want to know more about daily life in her time. This book is not concerned with the global or political situation in England during Austen's lifetime except inasmuch as politics affected daily life. Instead, the book starts with how people married and proceeds through childhood, work and leisure, religion, crime, medicine, and death to paint a picture of English life.

This is not a biography of Jane Austen, but the authors often return to her letters, her novels, and moments in her life as they apply to the topic at hand. This helps anchor the book. Because the book quotes so often from people's letters and journals, and refers to the specific lives of individuals, it feels personal and immediate. It describes the lives of the rich, the poor, and the in-between. It also describes life in the country as well as life in London.

If you are looking for information on topics like the events of Court or the troop movements in war, then this is not your book, although you might like the authors' other books: *The War for All the Oceans*, *Trafalgar*, and *Jack Tar*. If, on the other hand, you too are captivated by Regency earache treatments, exactly how long a working-class person could put off getting married even after living with someone and having several babies, how often people washed their bedding, and the challenges of managing menstruation in dresses made of the lightest material possible with no underwear, then you will enjoy this book very much!

- Carrie S.

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## Sophia says

I picked this one up for research purposes that focused on daily Georgian Era life. And for what I wanted, it was very helpful. That it included bits about Jane Austen's life? Bonus.

The book's chapters are sorted by topic and takes the natural beginning of birth and follows that through to the last chapter on death. I appreciated the approach the authors' took in that it wasn't dry and pedantic. Even though this is non-fiction, there were protagonists of a sort. The authors chose a handful of people who existed at the time in various walks of life- a governess, a clergyman, an impoverished gentleman, a couple foreign travelers, a gentle lady, etc- and used their letters and journals to share their experiences of the topic that was being discussed. I thought it was a great way to learn about the life of the times.

And instead of just tackling a topic and spitting out lots of research, there is a conversational tone. Now, this tone did not romanticize life in those times. Not at all. For example, the chapter on child birth and marriage talks of grave situations when people had a child out of wedlock and how the law came down hard on this. I cringed through the discussions of the conditions of the inns, primitive plumbing, medical and mental issues,

crime & punishment, the affects of war and famine, and well, pretty much most of the topics because it was hard times.

But it wasn't just the same ol' stuff. It was fairly comprehensive from cricket-playing miners to traveling by canal boat.

This book focused on the average person's life and not so much that of the privilege few at the top. It didn't just discuss the facts of the life, but the perceptions, too. It was interesting to compare opinion of then with the general opinion of contemporary times.

As to the Jane Austen connection, she was the main 'character' tie-in through each chapter. There were references to her and her family's lives, but her letters were a main source for the authors, too. In some ways her thinking was innovative and compared to the two gentlemen who traveled a great deal from their respective homes in America and Germany- which is something because she lived rather sheltered. But, in other ways, she was a product of her times.

Beyond the topical chapters, the book also features illustrations, charts, index, and bibliography which are great sources in and of themselves.

All in all, I was pleased with the book for what I needed. I think that the armchair scholar would probably enjoy it and its a nice all-round source to create a background rather than a detailed picture.

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## **Lex says**

This review is about the book "Jane Austen's England" by Roy and Lesley Adkins. "Jane Austen's England" is a non-fiction book about what life was like in England during Austen's life. The chapters are set in life stages or dichotomies : Wedding Bells, Breeding, Toddler to Teenager, Home and Hearth, Fashions and Filth, Sermons and Superstitions, Wealth and Work, Leisure and Pleasure, On the Move, Dark Deeds, Medicine Men, and Last Words. Within these chapters, the authors describe these different subject matters, often using passages from people's diaries as evidence to their claims. I did like how the book went through life stages and the descriptions about them. However, I found the quoted diary passages often tedious and more often than not, from the same person repeatedly, like they only read a couple of diaries and worked from there. What is sorely lacking in this book is Jane Austen herself and her family! There are many letters that survived within the family, Jane Austen's included, that could have been referenced. Jane Austen or her relatives are mentioned only a few times which is quite shocking, giving the title of this book. I did learn a few new things reading this book so if you are a diehard Jane Austen fan, I do recommend you read it. However, be prepared for a reference-styled book with little mention of her. If you would like to read something similar instead, I would recommend "What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew" by Daniel Pool. It is a more quick and concise reference of England during the 19th century with many references to Brit Lit authors' books and characters of that time period, using two very well known authors to represent the early and later parts of the century. Since Jane Austen lived from 1775 to 1817, her life could not be fully represented, whereas "Jane Austen's England" does speak more of the 18th century. However, her work was written in the 1790's or later, and her books weren't published until the 19th century. Therefore, the book "What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew" is actually explaining the lives of their characters during that time period of England rather than the authors themselves. It is a great companion/reference book to these great works of literature. To sum up this long book review: to learn about historical England during Jane Austen's life time, read "Jane Austen's England." To learn about what life was like for Jane Austen characters of the 18th century, read "What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens

Knew." Note: Neither of these are actual Jane Austen biographies.

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## **Erin says**

I received an ARC through a Goodreads giveaway.

I was particularly intrigued by this book as an avid Austen fan who is interested in learning more about the time period of Austen's novels. While the novels give great insight into the lives of a particular class, there's so much more to learn--and that's precisely where the Adkins's book comes in. Compellingly written with an impressive amount of detail, "Jane Austen's England" provides its readers with a look at the nitty gritty of life in Regency England.

Each chapter gives a summary of a different period in the lives of its subjects (e.g., marriage or death) and proceeds to describe the facts that Austen never delves into, both through narrative description and first-hand accounts. While this book would likely be of interest to anyone wishing to learn more about the time period, I think it will be most appreciated by those familiar with Austen, as much of the history is described in the context of her novels. Overall, this book made me want to return to Austen's novels again, newly informed about what's going on behind the scenes.

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## **Navarra says**

What started out as a fascinating book describing cultural and historic details of the time period in which Jane Austen lived and wrote quickly got bogged down in excessive long quotations three-quarters of the way through. There was a lot that didn't get covered. Ironically, the author mentions that despite the wars and importance of the military during this time, she almost completely glosses over it herself. The Chapter entitled "On the Move" that discussed the types of travel available was overly long, full of unnecessary and perversely arbitrary detail and didn't seem to touch on sea travel much at all.

This book was not all that enjoyable and missed a lot of detail about daily activities and domestic duties that I think would have appealed to many who enjoy her books. Much of the book assumes the reader knows a great deal of the time period, so many interesting tidbits suddenly jump out of nowhere with questions begging. I was left with a great many of these questions by the end of the book, for instance: From where did the idea that the poor weren't to travel outside of their parish derive? Apparently they still managed to move around, so what were the exceptions to the "rule?" What are the rules behind the card game whist? What did people actually do when they visited resorts such as Brighton? What kinds of activities did middle class young women engage in? Older women? What was the average day like? There was likely some sort of scheduling. What were some key points in etiquette? We get glimpses of what age women "came out into society" in Jane Austen's books, but what were the rules for that?

In summary, there was a lot of interesting material here, but I felt the book was unfinished and spent far too much time quoting from source material; time that would have been better spent summarizing for the reader. I have nothing against a scholarly tome, but if that this what this was, it should have begun in the same fashion as it ended and been far more specific to a topic or a far longer, more detail book.

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## **Éowyn says**

A look at the social history around the time of Jane Austen. The book uses Austen's life and letters, but also diaries and letters of a group of other, non-famous people to illuminate different aspects of the period.

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## **Venus Smurf says**

This book was absolutely beyond fascinating. It takes a look into the England of Jane Austin's day, describing common practices, common problems, behavior, settings...everything and the kitchen sink. It's intelligent, often funny, always insightful. Reading this completely enriched my understanding of Austen-era novels but also provided insight into society of the time. Very well researched, very detailed, very, very worth reading. My only complaint is that my copy came through a giveaway and doesn't have page numbers. When I inevitably use this for one of my classes or a paper, I'm going to need an official copy so I can quote it.

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## **Lucy says**

Highly recommended, especially for lovers of Jane Austen, but also for readers of Regency romances and historical novels of the period. This book covers a lot of things that don't make it into the novels, like the appalling state of medicine and law at the time. Using quotes from diaries of the period, the authors illuminate the life of the time.

Chapters are: Wedding bells -- Breeding -- Toddler to teenager -- Home and hearth -- Fashions and filth -- Sermons and superstitions -- Wealth and work -- Leisure and pleasure -- On the move -- Dark deeds -- Medicine men -- Last words. There are also several maps, a chart of Weights and Measures, a Chronological Overview of Jane Austen's life and episodes in British history from the ascension of George III to the British throne in 1760 to the publication of Jane Austen's unfinished novel Sanditon in 1925.

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## **Sotiris Karaiskos says**

Η Jane Austen μ'σα απ' τα βιβλ'α της μας δ'νει πολλ'ς πληροφορ'ες για την ζω' στην Αγγλ'α της εποχ'ς της. Η αλ'θεια ?μ'ως ε'ναι ?τι δεν δ'νει και τ'σες πολλ'ς ?στε να ?χουμε μ'α ολοκληρωμ'νη εικ'να. Αυτ' το πρ'βλημα ?ρχεται να το λ'σει αυτ' εδ' το βιβλ'ο, δε?χνοντας μ'λιστα και ιδια?τερο ζ'λο. ?νας πραγματικ'ς ποταμ'ς πληροφορι'ν για κ'θε πτυχ' της ζω'ς στη χ'ρα που ?ζησε η μεγ'λη συγγραφ'ας.

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## **Marjolijn says**

Interessant, maar een beetje saai geschreven. Het boek was voor mij boeiender geworden als de schrijvers

veel meer vanuit de teksten van Jane Austen waren uitgegaan. Nu hebben ze slechts de periode waarin zij leefde als uitgangspunt voor dit boek genomen.

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## Leslie says

This book does a wonderful job of bringing you a detailed and fascinating look at the world that Jane Austen inhabited. Granted many of the subjects covered won't appear in a Jane Austen book the same way the Fukushima earthquake wouldn't appear in a Twilight book.

Authors of JAFF should read this book. Especially the ones who love to have Darcy and Lizzy bathing multiple times per day in deep copper tubs of hot water.

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## Stephen says

*Jane Austen's England* by Roy Adkins and Lesley Adkins (*Eavesdropping on Jane Austen's England* in the U.K.) is not the kind of book that will appeal to everybody, but for Janeites and English history buffs there is much to recommend it.

For the reader whose idea of the elegant world of Jane Austen has been drawn by film adaptations of her novels, the reality described by the Adkins might be dismaying. We see on screen the candlelit balls attended by women in beautiful gowns and men in powdered wigs. What we mercifully don't experience is the smell of a crowded, hot room of physically active people who do not regularly bathe. Soap itself was a luxury for the rich and it was not the practice of even the gentry to immerse themselves in water.

*Jane Austen's England* covers the years from about 1770 to 1820, bracketing Austen's life by a few years. Georgian and Regency England were defined by a rigid class system. Austen writes of the gentry, mostly of the lower sort but occasionally the titled. The lower classes including the merchant class are seldom noticed and then usually dismissively, yet they were the bulk of the English people.

When Jane Austen was writing her novels, children were being maimed and deformed from working in mines and mills and as indentured farm laborers, people died from starvation, England was nearly constantly at war and the lower classes were heavily burdened with taxes to pay for them, and more than 220 offenses such as property theft and poaching were capital crimes. The hand of the government and the gentry was heavy upon the lower classes. Little of this appears in Austen's works. Her audience was quite aware of the conditions of the times and the purpose of her novels was to entertain, not reform.

Jane Austen herself appears relatively little in this book although there are quotations from her novels and letters. *Jane Austen's England* does address life and customs in that era from birth to burial practices including descriptions of homes, clothing, work and compensation, leisure activities, and medical treatments. Much of this information is given in the form of letters and diaries of various clergymen, newspaper articles, and reports from the courts.

The affairs of clergy figure heavily into the lives of Austen's characters, from the unctuous buffoon Mr.



Collins in *Pride and Prejudice* to the social-climbing Mr. Elton in *Emma* and to love interests of the protagonists such as Henry Tilney in *Northanger Abbey* and Edward Ferrars in *Sense and Sensibility*. Austen's father was an Anglican rector. The Adkins give a most helpful explanation of the role of the clergy in Georgian society. When a clergyman, often the younger son of gentry, was "given a living" instead of "following a calling," it meant just that. Being placed in a parish was essentially a financial arrangement done at the behest of a wealthy landowner or university. Laymen sometimes became the vicar of a parish as an investment, and hired curates to conduct the affairs of the church such as preaching and funerals. Some clergy were in possession of several livings and visited their parishes only once a year to collect tithes, originally in the form of crops and livestock but later as money. It's no surprise, then, that Austen did not hold clergy in high esteem.

*Jane Austen's England* is recommended for those interested in understanding the milieu apparent to Austen's original readers and in gaining a better appreciation of the unspoken circumstances that flavor her novels. You will never read them the same way again.

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### **Susanna - Censored by GoodReads says**

Excellent social history.

For a further review: <http://susannag.booklikes.com/post/64...>

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### **Monica Fairview says**

I enjoyed reading this, although it wasn't as radical as I thought it would be. Anyone who's read David Nokes' autobiography is well aware of how much of a struggle it was for Jane Austen's family to keep up appearances when they were constantly worried about money.

It has some really good information, though. The section about the chimney sweeps was really good as were many of the sections. I think probably it's a very good starting point for those who are coming new to the Regency Period. I would whole heartedly recommend it as one of the first books to read if you want to know more about the Regency than what the costume dramas tell you.

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### **Melissa says**

A bit anticlimactic, since I've read a number of Austen non-fiction recently. I feel like they skimmed on providing examples from Austen's books when bringing up historical facts. The organization was strange. The chapters were organized into topics that moved chronologically from marriage to death, which was fine, but within the chapters the narrative veered all over the place. The authors should have grouped information within subsections.

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## **Linda says**

The husband and wife historians, Roy and Lesley Adkins, have done it again. They've written a lively, immensely informative survey giving us a look at life in England during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Going beyond the rather narrow world that Austen writes about, the authors give us a glimpse of the daily lives of the middle and lower classes, who comprised three-quarters of the British population -- a population that included the great novelist herself.

If you want to become more familiar with the England of Jane Austen's time, if you want to pop in on an average day and see a poor-to-middlin' person at work or at play, getting born, growing up, marrying, through sickness and in health, Jane Austen's England is your time machine. Immensely readable, either cover-to-cover or as a pick-up-and-browse, this book is ideal for both Austen aficionados, and those who like to read popular history. One of the Adkins' strength as authors is their inclusion of first-hand accounts, judiciously peppered throughout this fascinating survey.

The hardback version is beautifully produced, with maps, images, appendices --including a timeline. Well footnoted and indexed, the style is never-the-less very readable. Indeed, the work not only sheds light on the era, it brings it to life.

Published in England as "Eavesdropping on Jane Austen's England."

Also highly recommended by the same authors -- Nelson's Trafalgar, The War for All the Oceans, and Jack Tar.

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## **CatBookMom says**

Not as readable as the other books I've read about the late-Georgian and Regency eras. The authors used several contemporary diaries and memoirs as source material, and a few issues, not being mentioned in those sources, are skimmed over with little explanation. However, this does offer more information about the lives of the poor and working poor than the other references I've read.

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