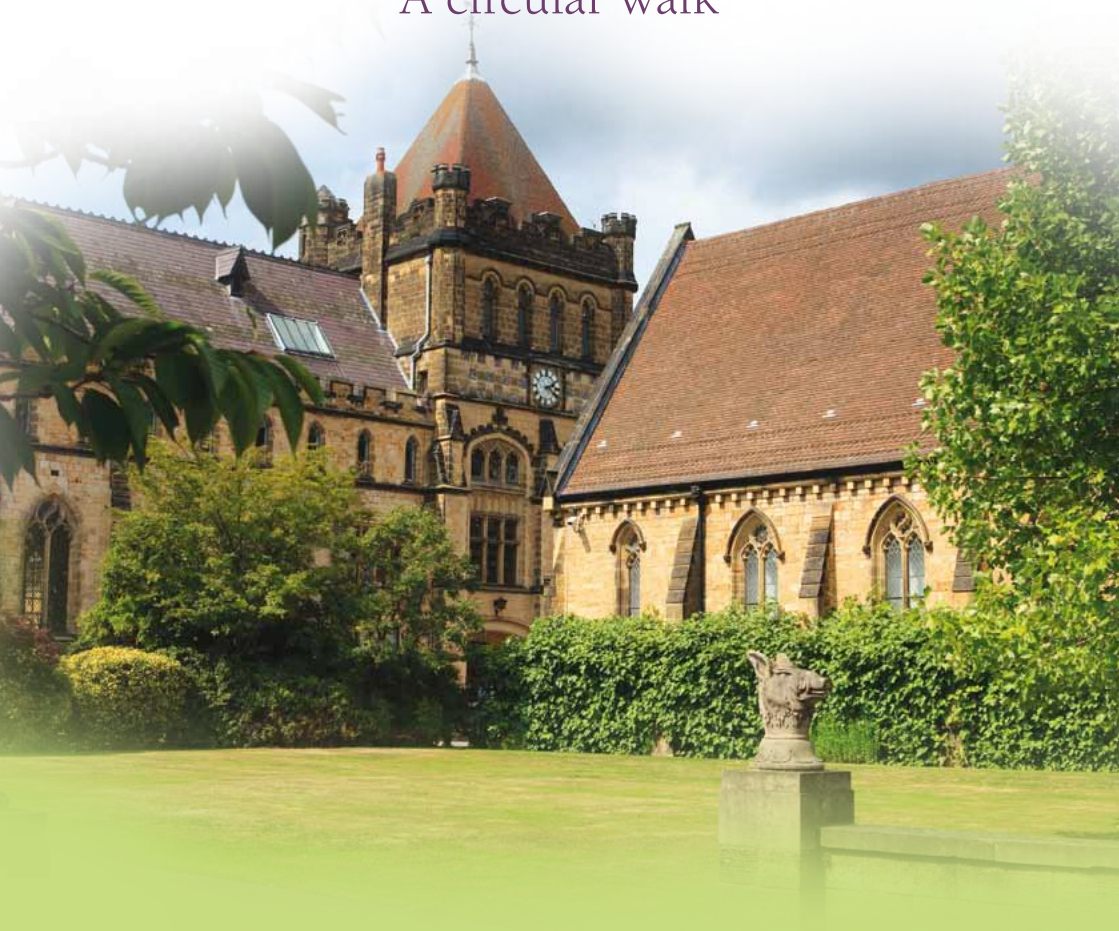


# Jane Austen & Tonbridge

## A circular walk





*"Fanny and I went into the park yesterday and drove about, and were very much entertained; and our dinner and evening went off very well. Messrs. J. Plumptre and J. Wildman called while we were out, and we had a glimpse of them both, and of G. Hatton too, in the park."* Letter from Jane to Cassandra Austen, dated 5th of March, 1814.

Jane Austen was born at Steventon in Hampshire on the 16<sup>th</sup> of December, 1775, to George and Cassandra Austen. George's family had many links to Kent, and to Tonbridge in particular. This walk will take you to places known to be connected to the Austen family, including the school where George Austen was a pupil and later taught and the church where many of the family worshipped and where some are buried.

The circular walk begins and ends at Tonbridge Library. We hope this walk will whet your appetite to read more about Jane Austen or to find out more about her life or the history of Tonbridge. Please take care when crossing roads. An audio version of this walk is available from Tonbridge Library or to download at [www.kent.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/libraries](http://www.kent.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/libraries).

## 1 Tonbridge Library

Tonbridge was one of the first towns in Kent to set up a public library service, in 1882. The library has been operating from its present site in Avebury Avenue since 1900. The library holds material on Jane Austen's life and links with the town.

As you leave the library, turn left, cross the road in a safe place and continue along the pavement. The first turning on the right will take you over a bridge into the Park. Turn left and follow the path round the play area.

## 2 The Park

In the nineteenth century, this Park was Tonbridge Racecourse. In Jane Austen's day, it was part of the Castle Estate.

Tonbridge has been a market town for centuries, and, despite modern additions, it has over a hundred and fifty listed buildings, some of which would have been familiar to the Austen family.

Walking in London's parks was a fashionable pastime for those who



wished to see and be seen. It usually took place early in the evening, before returning home by about half past seven to dress for dinner. Jane wrote to Cassandra in 1814 of the people she and her niece saw while out driving:

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As many authors do, Jane used her own experiences as material for her books. In a letter to Cassandra written in 1811 while working on *Sense and Sensibility*, she wrote:

*"I had a pleasant walk in Kensington Gardens on Sunday with Henry, Mr. Smith, and Mr. Tilson; everything was fresh and beautiful."*

Jane Austen wrote six full-length novels, only four of which were published in her lifetime. Novels were a comparatively recent form of literature, appearing in the mid-eighteenth century. It was not an art form that met with universal approval.

It was condemned for appealing to the masses, especially women and servants.

Despite poking fun at popular novels in *Northanger Abbey*, Jane Austen was stout in the defence of her calling and her novels have become some of the best-loved works in the English language. She would have been gratified that her defence of her art has been taken up by so many on her behalf.

Leave the Park at the swimming pool, crossing the little bridge into the Castle grounds. Turn right and follow the path, then turning left up the hill to the Castle Gatehouse.

### 3 Tonbridge Castle

George Austen's cousin, the Revd Henry Austen, married Mary Hooker in 1763. Her family owned Tonbridge Castle. Henry and Mary retired to Tonbridge after moving between parishes in West Kent, and their son Edgar attended Tonbridge School. The castle was built at the time of the Norman Conquest. Stone from the towers, walls and keep was used in the building of the Medway canal from 1741, and the mansion was built by John Hooker in 1791.



The castle was sold to Tonbridge Urban District Council in 1898. The Gatehouse was opened to the public in 1992. Audio tours of the castle are available.

Leave the Castle through the Gatehouse, following the path through the rose garden. Turn left by the public toilets and cross the road by the old fire station. Continuing along Bank Street, past the shops, you will also see the old Corn Exchange. As the road joins the High Street the new building to your left is Wellington Place.

### 4 No. 174 High Street

The building that stood upon this site in the eighteenth century was partly destroyed by fire in 1997, and has since been demolished. Although it is not certain, this is believed to have been the home of Jane's grandfather, William Austen, who was a surgeon. His children, Jane's father George and his sisters Leonora and Philadelphia, lived here until William died in 1737, when George was six.

Their mother, Rebecca Hampson, had died two years earlier and their stepmother, Susannah Kelk, does



not seem to have been fond of the children. George was sent to Tonbridge School, his education paid for by William's brother Francis, a Sevenoaks lawyer. His sisters were sent to relatives, while Susannah remained here in the house she inherited.

Next door, we come to No. 180 and No. 182 High Street.



#### 5 180 High Street and 182 High Street

A house known as Fosse Bank, named after the town's early defences, stood on the site of No. 182 High Street. It is believed that the Revd Henry Austen lived here with his wife, Mary Hooker. Only three of their five children survived infancy. Their only son Edgar was educated at Tonbridge School, following in his father's footsteps. While he was there, Jane's parents George and Cassandra Austen visited Tonbridge in 1783. It is not known if Jane was with them, although her brother Francis did accompany

them. Later, the Austens moved next door to number 180 and Fosse Bank became the Tonbridge Ladies College, intended for sisters of pupils at Tonbridge School.

#### 6 186 High Street - Blair House

Blair House was the home of Jane's great uncle Thomas Austen. Thomas, an apothecary, lived in Tonbridge all his adult life and is buried in the parish churchyard. It is likely that he and his wife, Elizabeth Burgess, lived here when they were first married. Their son Henry, later the Revd Henry, lived here before going to Tonbridge School.

Continue walking up the High Street, crossing the road at Lansdowne Road. Carry on until you reach Tonbridge School.

#### 7 Tonbridge School

Tonbridge School was founded by Sir Andrew Judde in 1553. George Austen's cousin Henry was the first of the family to be educated here. George started at the school while Henry was Head Boy. On completing his education, George won a school scholarship and bursary, which enabled him to go to Oxford University.



*Jane Austen's novels have become some of the best-loved works in the English language.*



After gaining his degree, he returned to Tonbridge School as a teacher, known as Usher or Second Master. Among his pupils was Francis Motley Austen, the son of his Sevenoaks uncle Francis Austen, who had paid for George's education at the school. A blue plaque erected by the Jane Austen (Kent) Society to commemorate George's time here is on the wall of the Cawthorn Lecture Theatre in the school.

The large red building opposite the school is Ferox Hall. Cross the road at the pedestrian crossing.

#### 8 Ferox Hall

Ferox Hall (Ferox meaning the great lake trout) was owned by the Danvers family in the eighteenth century. It was their niece, Susannah Kelk, who married Jane's grandfather William Austen, becoming stepmother to George Austen and his siblings.

Carry on walking on the same side of the road, turning left into Bordyke.

#### 9 Chauntlers

Before her marriage to Jane's great-grandfather John Austen, her great grandmother Elizabeth Weller lived at Chauntlers, a large property that has since been divided into two houses: The Priory and The Red House. Elizabeth was left almost penniless after the death of her husband, receiving no help from her own family, despite their wealth. She sold everything she could to repay her debts and moved the family to Sevenoaks. There, she took a position as housekeeper to the headmaster of Sevenoaks Grammar School.

This provided her children with a home and education. Three of her seven children returned to Tonbridge, including Jane's grandfather William and great uncle Thomas.

Retrace your steps to the pedestrian crossing at the junction with the high street, cross Bordyke and continue along the High Street, turning left into Church Lane.



## 10 The Parish Church of St Peter and St Paul

The Parish Church of St Peter and St Paul is a place of worship that has been at the heart of Tonbridge for about 900 years. The original Norman church, built in the early twelfth century, forms the chancel of the present building.

The church was enlarged and altered over the following centuries. In 1820, alterations were made to the nave roof and the north aisle, and the south gallery was built. Box pews were installed, but were later removed in the 1870s. Until the nineteenth century, the Parish of St Peter and St Paul was the largest in Kent. The Austen family worshipped here.

As you enter the church, turn left, and enter the side chapel of St Nicholas. Nearly all the people remembered on the north wall were friends or relations of Jane Austen.

Jane's grandfather William returned to Tonbridge, as a surgeon. Although Elizabeth Weller and her son Thomas

are believed to be buried in the churchyard, William is the only one whose grave remains marked. It is in the north aisle, but covered by the carpet for preservation. A photograph of the grave is on the north wall. As you will see, he is not buried alone, but with his wife, Rebecca Walter, who died after giving birth to their fourth child.

A detailed description of the monuments in St Peter's and St Paul's is available in a booklet in the church.



As you leave the church you will see a list of former vicars in the church porch two former vicars with connections to the Austen family were the Revd. Henry Harpur and Revd. John Papillon. The Revd. Henry Harpur over saw Jane's father in his first curacy at Shipbourne church, and was also the uncle of JMW Turner, who stayed with him in Tonbridge to paint local scenes. The Revd. Papillon went from Tonbridge, to Chawton, where he became a good friend of Jane Austen and her family after her father's death and until her own.

Jane Austen herself is buried in the North Aisle of Winchester Cathedral in Hampshire, about fourteen miles from her birthplace, Steventon. Her grave is marked by a stone laid in her memory by her affectionate family: *In memory of JANE AUSTEN, youngest daughter of the late Revd GEORGE AUSTEN, formerly Rector of Steventon in this County. She departed this Life on the 18<sup>th</sup> of July 1817, aged 41, after a long illness supported with the patience and the hopes of a Christian.*

As you leave the church, turn left and continue through the churchyard past the little row of cottages in Church Street.

## 11 Powells (now Lyons)

The old building numbered 23, with white walls and an arched recess, was the home of Elizabeth Weller's eldest daughter, Betty. She married George Hooper, a lawyer, and their son, also George is commemorated in St Peter's and St Paul's Church. Jane's father George Austen came to live here after the death of his parents.

The question remains as to whether Jane herself visited Tonbridge. There is no conclusive evidence that she did, but it is very possible. She visited Sevenoaks, and was a frequent visitor to Kent. Even if she did not come to Tonbridge itself, it is certain that she knew many of its residents and would have appreciated its importance in her family history and the life it enabled her to lead.

To return to the library, continue along East Street until you join the High Street. Turning left, follow the High Street back to the library, turning right into Avebury Avenue. Alternatively, you can cross at the pedestrian crossing and return through the Castle grounds and park.



2.4 mile (3.8km) walk

Alternative route 1.6 mile (2.6km)

Train Station

Take care

Kilometres

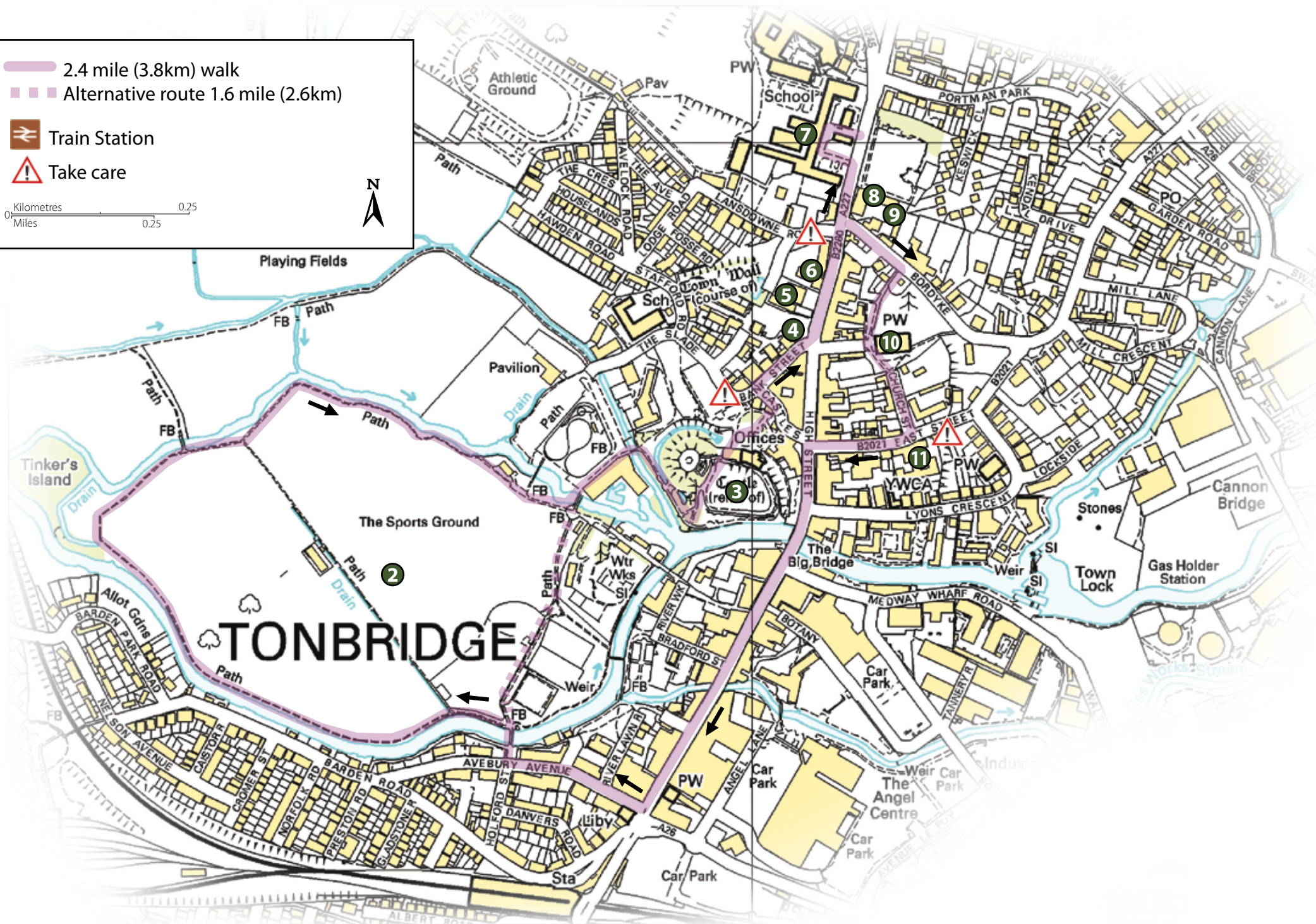
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A more detailed history of Jane Austen in Tonbridge can be found in Margaret Wilson's book, 'Jane Austen's family and Tonbridge'. A special collection of Jane Austen's novels and books celebrating the life and times of Jane Austen can be found at Tonbridge Library. Why not pop in to have a browse or borrow a book now? It is easy to join and it's free!

You can also logon to [www.kent.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/libraries](http://www.kent.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/libraries) to discover the online library service.



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The Parish of St. Peter & St. Paul, Tonbridge