

NAXOS  
AudioBooks

NON-  
FICTION

BIOGRAPHIES



Elizabeth  
Jenkins

Jane  
Austen:  
A Biography

Read by  
**Teresa  
Gallagher**

NA220112D

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1	The 18th century and the Austen home	6:02
2	17th December 1775 – the birth of Jane Austen at Steventon Rectory	5:30
3	Back home in Steventon	3:04
4	Eliza Hancock – the Comtesse de Feuillide	8:58
5	Tom Lefroy	1:51
6	Early writings	1:57
7	Two pretty girls – Jane and Cassandra	7:19
8	The dance with Tom Lefroy	4:08
9	First Impressions, 1797: declined	3:56
10	Family matters, 1798	5:46
11	Jane Austen to Bath, 1799	3:24
12	1800-1801 the move to 4 Sydney Place, Bath	5:48
13	November 1802 – A proposal	2:41
14	Northanger Abbey finished	0:50
15	The death of Reverend George Austen, Jane's father, and the Battle of Trafalgar 1805/1806-7 – Southampton	8:52
16	A family house party at Godmersham	3:59
17	The death of Elizabeth Austen	4:37

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18	Northanger Abbey – a publisher declines to publish	1:31
19	1809 – arrival at Chawton Cottage, Hampshire	5:20
20	Back to writing	2:34
21	The publication of Sense and Sensibility by Thomas Egerton 1811	2:54
22	Pride and Prejudice re-written and published – 'by the author of Sense and Sensibility' 1813	4:42
23	Mansfield Park in progress and published in 1814	8:47
24	Emma – and matchmaking advice	8:47
25	1816 – Emma finished	4:09
26	Henry's illness and a royal admirer	7:01
27	A sixth novel – but ill-health commences	5:36
28	Persuasion – and family life	6:10
29	Fanny in a 'perplexity'	6:46
30	The will of Mr Leigh Perrot	2:54
31	Another relapse and a move to Winchester	4:37
32	17-18 July 1817 – the death of Jane Austen at 8 College Street, Winchester	3:21

**Total time: 2:30:20**

## Elizabeth Jenkins

# Jane Austen: A Biography

Jane Austen's novels aroused admiration from the beginning, but at first the circle of admirers, though it included distinguished people, was a small one; but increased steadily; today, admiration is at flood-tide. Considering those infallible tests of popularity - film and television - there must be an answer as to why her work has this public success, but the answer is difficult to find. Her six novels are, each of them, concerned with three or four families, living in a country neighbourhood; in each of the books, one of the important characters (in five of the six it is the heroine) makes a very serious error of judgement which in the end she honestly admits, and is restored to a life of happiness. In the course of each story, the other characters interact, and maintain an essential connection with the plot; the construction of the novel is as masterly as the characterisation.

All this is obvious to any devoted

reader of the novels, but I, for one, did not realize, until I made a thorough study of Jane Austen's letters (chiefly to her sister Cassandra, with whom she was on terms of complete intimacy) how much these form an illuminating background to the novelist. They reveal how much love and support she gave to, and received from, her family: her sister, above all, but also (highly important to her) her five brothers: James, who succeeded their father as Rector of Steventon; Edward, who was adopted by rich relatives, who conferred on him estates and a fortune, and whose name, Knight, he afterwards took; Henry, the banker and man of the world, and Francis and Charles, both on active service in the Navy during the Napoleonic Wars. The marriages of four of these brothers produced, among them, a tribe of nephews and nieces, in all of whom their aunt Jane took a lively, affectionate interest. Her favourite

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nephew, James Edward Austen, (afterwards owing to family arrangements, Austen Leigh) published the first work about her, written by somebody who had actually known her. He was greatly helped by the memories of his numerous cousins, one of whom says:- 'You loved her because she seemed to love you.' This is a little unexpected as a recollection of someone known to the world for irony and lively wit!

James Edward tells us that she had no separate writing room in the cottage at Chawton (where she lived with her mother and Cassandra from 1809 until her death in 1817), where the novels, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Northanger Abbey* and *Pride and Prejudice* were revised, and *Mansfield Park*, *Emma* and *Persuasion* composed from the beginning. He relates that her work was done in the family living room, at a little desk, on small sheets of paper, which she slipped under a blotter at the approach of an unexpected visitor. James Edward says that no doubt he or his sisters or cousins 'frequently disturbed the

mystic process without any idea of the mischief we were doing.'

Walter Scott, the most famous novelist of Jane Austen's day, said of her writing, 'That young lady has a talent for describing the feelings and involvements of ordinary life, the most wonderful I ever met with', he went on, 'she makes ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting from the truth of the character and the sentiment.' In our own time Somerset Maugham has said, 'She was not interested in the uncommon, but in the common. She made it uncommon by the keenness of her observation.' He added the praise the most valuable a novelist can receive, 'She is wonderfully readable.'

James Edward's term 'mystic process' is in tune with Virginia Woolf's comment, 'Jane Austen is mistress of much more emotion than appears on the surface, she stimulates us to supply what is not there.' The home-life of Chawton Cottage was enlivened by the young members of the family but it did not depend on them; it provided interesting cares of house-keeping and

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gardening; for leisure it had books, music, table-games and fine needlework. Jane Austen herself loved dancing; there were occasional balls in the neighbourhood and dinner parties, after which one of the company sat down at the pianoforte, and the rest danced. Light-footed and active, she enjoyed country walks. Since she said in a letter to Cassandra, she must own that she thought Elizabeth Bennet, of *Pride and Prejudice* 'as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print', it is surely allowable to see in Elizabeth, hurrying to visit her sister who has been taken ill in a neighbouring house, some reflection of Jane Austen 'crossing field after field at a quick pace, jumping over stiles and springing over puddles'. It is a picture that reminds one not only of Jane Austen herself, but of that line of the poet Blake:- 'Live delights in life.'

### **Notes by Elizabeth Jenkins**

**ELIZABETH JENKINS**, the novelist and writer, has maintained a continuing affection for Jane Austen and her work. Miss Jenkins was a founder member, with Dorothy Darnell, her sisters and others, of the Jane Austen Society which in its turn led to the Jane Austen Memorial Trust and its purchase of Jane Austen's House in Chawton, Hampshire. The house was bought for the Trust by a retired local solicitor Edward Carpenter.

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# JANE AUSTEN'S HOUSE



PHOTOGRAPH: JANE AUSTEN MEMORIAL TRUST

This attractive cottage, with two sitting rooms, six bedchambers and outbuildings, was the home of the novelist from 1809 until her death in 1817. It was there that she wrote most of the work by which she is remembered and it has become a focus for Jane Austen memorabilia and Jane Austen studies. Among the many items owned and displayed by the Jane Austen Memorial Trust are some of her music books – Jane Austen was a keen pianist who used to practise daily on a square piano, a popular instrument of the day. Although Cramer is the only composer mentioned in her books, she played many composers ranging from Handel, Clementi and Haydn to Storace and Dibdin, and was evidently a capable pianist.

**JANE AUSTEN'S HOUSE: CHAWTON, ALTON, HAMPSHIRE, ENGLAND. TEL/FAX: +44 (0)1420 83262.**

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**The music on this recording is taken from the NAXOS Catalogue.**

<b>CLEMENTI</b> PIANO MUSIC Balazs Szokolay, piano	8.550452
<b>CLEMENTI</b> PIANO SONATAS OP 40 Pietro De Maria	8.553500
<b>HAYDN</b> PIANO SONATAS VOL 8 Jenő Jandó, piano	8.553825
<b>HAYDN</b> PIANO SONATAS VOL 9 Jenő Jandó, piano	8.553826

**Music programming by Nicolas Soames**



Elizabeth Jenkins

# Jane Austen: A Biography

Read by **Teresa Gallagher**

This highly enjoyable account of the life of Jane Austen is regarded as the classic biography of one of the greatest English novelists. It illustrates not only the character and opinions of an unusually perceptive and gifted woman, but also the social life amongst the county gentry of Georgian England. Outside her writing, Jane Austen's main interest was her large and affectionate family and their circle of friends. This is the world she so brilliantly depicted in her novels, and Elizabeth Jenkins shows how often the settings and characters mirrored the writer's own life in Hampshire.



**Teresa Gallagher** has performed in many leading roles in both plays and musicals across the country, London's West End, and Off Broadway. In addition, she is a well-known voice to listeners of BBC Radio Drama. Her work on film includes *The Misadventures of Margaret* and Mike Leigh's *Topsy-Turvy*.

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Abridged by Heather Godwin. Produced by Nicolas Soames.  
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Total time  
2:30:20