

Jane Austen's
Banker Brother:
Henry Thomas Austen
of Austen & Co.,
1801-1816

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HENRY WAS JANE AUSTEN'S CLOSEST BROTHER. In "Jane Austen's Soldier Brother" (Caplan), we followed his life from 1793 to 1801—the period of his service as an officer in the Oxfordshire Regiment of Militia—and we outlined the influence that this had on his sister's work. Henry was handsome and clever and anxious to be rich. In January 1801, harboring dreams of affluence, he opened an army agency in London. At the same time his two sisters, Jane and Cassandra, were leaving the childhood home at Steventon and moving with their parents to Bath. Jane's later visits to Henry in London were to be of great value, for it was largely through his support and encouragement that her work was able to reach us.

Henry and his wife, Eliza de Feuillide, could count on a variety of assets on beginning their new life. Eliza knew the French émigré community, and she was the godchild of Warren Hastings, who had settled a fortune of £10,000 on her and her invalid son. Henry had a large acquaintance among military men and in society, and as paymaster of the Oxfords he had become familiar with army finance. He retained the patronage of his old colonel, William Gore-Langton, and so was able to begin his new career with the agency for the Oxfordshire Regiment. His office was in Cleveland Court, a short passage of eight houses just across the road from the royal palace of St.

James. Around the corner, on Cleveland Row, lived John Woodman (*Family Record* 28), who was married to Warren Hastings's sister, Anne, and was joint trustee with the Rev. George Austen of Eliza's fortune. Austen & Co. was a partnership; the other partner was Henry Maunde, who had served with Henry in the Oxfordshire Militia and had succeeded him as paymaster.

The Austens lived at 24 Upper Berkeley Street, off Portman Square. Cassandra, who was staying at Godmersham, their brother Edward's estate in Kent, lost no time in paying them a visit. Jane wrote to her from Steventon on 25 January 1801: "I hope you will see everything worthy notice, from the Opera House to Henry's office in Cleveland Court; and I shall expect you to lay in a stock of intelligence that may procure me amusement for a twelvemonth to come." Philadelphia Austen, another visitor later that year, found the Henry Austens living quite in style (*Papers* 174).

Maintaining that style depended on the prosperity of Henry's army agency. An army agent was a middle man between the governmental office of the Paymaster General and the paymaster of a regiment. All the financial business of the regiment passed through his hands. He was appointed by the patronage of the colonel of the regiment, sometimes as a gift, but more commonly by purchase. He profited by the pay of one "warrant man" per company (i.e., a fictitious man), at sixpence a day; and by twopence in the pound deducted from the whole regimental payroll. There were other ways by which an agent could profit: he became the private banker of the officers, and he could become a half-pay agent. Half pay, for the inactive officers of the army or navy, was paid out in London semiannually. To avoid the inconvenience of traveling to London, an officer could appoint a half-pay agent to collect his money for him, the agent receiving sixpence in the pound for his trouble (two-and-a-half percent). But the best way for an agent to make money was illicit; it involved the backdoor buying and selling of commissions. Much more than the standard fee would be paid for a desired promotion, or an attractive regiment, even though an affidavit of denial had to be signed. The practice was frowned upon, barely tolerated, and shortly was to become an open scandal.¹

In April 1801 Frank William Austen, the older sailor brother, arrived home from the Mediterranean, where he had won substantial

prize money (*Family Record* 110-11). Jane wrote to Cassandra: "Frank writes me word that he is to be in London tomorrow; some money Negotiation from which he hopes to derive advantage, hastens him from Kent..." (26-27 May 1801). Frank and Henry were to become close financial partners. Austen & Co. were also navy agents, and were so listed in contemporary directories—having two sailor brothers in the family made this a logical step.²

An intriguing document has survived from the early days of Austen & Co. (Memorial Trust). Dated 23 November 1801, it was a necessarily secret agreement between Henry Austen and Henry Maunde and a certain Charles James. A partnership was formed to profit from speculation in army commission brokerage and in the agency of half pay, the proceeds to be divided into three equal parts. Charles James is a well-known figure and was a protégé of Lord Moira. He wrote two best-sellers: a *Regimental Companion*, dedicated to the Prince of Wales, who declared that the book should be the companion of every military man throughout the kingdom, and a *Military Dictionary*, dedicated to the Duke of York, the Commander in Chief and fountainhead of all military patronage. This partnership would have been very rewarding but for the conclusion of the Peace of Amiens on 27 March 1802, which drastically cut all potential profit from military finance.

Henry tried to revive his flagging fortunes by seeking help from Warren Hastings, but this was not forthcoming, for there is a letter from Henry to him from 5 June 1802 in which Henry "cannot forgive the ingratitude of that kingdom which has prevented the powers of your benevolence from equaling the wishes of your heart" (*Papers* 176).

In the early spring of 1803 Henry and Eliza took advantage of the peace to make an excursion to France. An attempt to try to recover some of the de Feuillide property would be one motivation, but it also seems likely that Henry made some contacts concerning the wine trade. He had Eliza's French connections, his own in England, and his background in finance. His efforts seem to have born fruit. Mr. Henry J. B. Rice has in his possession a bill, dated 6 June 1803, from Messrs. Austen & Maunde of Cannon Row, for two casks of French wine sent to the Rev. H. Rice at Deane. Lawful trade could only last as long as the peace, but the Austen wine connection did continue. Jane Austen writes of being at Godmersham where she "shall eat ice

& drink French wine, & be above vulgar economy" (*Letters* 1 July 1808), and later tells Cassandra "Henry desires Edward may know that he has just bought 3 dozen of Claret for him (Cheap) & ordered it to be sent down to Chawton" (24 May 1813). During wartime wine would have to be smuggled, but this was certainly encouraged in many circles. When a later peace came in 1814, Henry resumed trading in wine, and on 1 February 1815 was able to supply George Bulkley of Great Titchfield Street with wines to the value of £665.³

Hostilities began again on 18 May 1803, bringing new hope and opportunity. Austen & Co. responded by moving their place of business to Cannon Row, Parliament Street. This was a short street of sixteen houses, some of them government offices, adjacent to the Houses of Parliament, and closer to potential sources of patronage. The firm thus succeeded in obtaining the agency for two new regiments. The first was the Nottinghamshire Militia, from 24 July, whose Colonel, Edward Thoroton Gould, lived at the evocatively named Mansfield Woodhouse. The second, from 24 September, was the North Devon Militia, whose Colonel was John Parker, the 2nd Lord Boringdon.

The Austens' relationship with this family was to become quite close: Henry gave drawing lessons to Boringdon's sister; the Boringdons both read *Pride and Prejudice* in 1813; and the peer was suspected of being Mr. Darcy. In 1815, after the Boringdons became the Earl and Countess of Morley, Jane Austen sent a precious copy of *Emma* to the Countess.⁴ Lord Boringdon's previous agent had been William Ogilvie, who had become bankrupt earlier in the year, resulting in quite a financial tangle. Ogilvie could no longer afford to keep his mistress, the soon to be notorious Mary Anne Clarke, and she promptly pulled herself up in status by forming a connection with none other than the Duke of York (Berry; Burne). The Duke left his former home at Albany House, Piccadilly, and by January 1804 it had been converted into chambers for single gentlemen. The garden was also turned into apartments, and that was where Austen and Maunde now settled—No.1, The Courtyard, Albany, Piccadilly—a most prestigious address for an army agency. Charles James, the secret partner, quietly moved into the private chambers. Henry and Eliza also moved their home at this time, to 16 Michaels Place, Brompton.

On 21 January 1805 the Rev. George Austen died suddenly at Bath. Henry, as befitted his financial expertise, took charge of arrang-

ing a settlement for Mrs. Austen, Jane, and Cassandra, who had been suddenly deprived of adequate income. He himself pledged to contribute £50 a year, and “shall do as much so long as my present precarious income remains.” Next day he wrote to Frank to congratulate him on his appointment to the *Canopus*, which, from his background as a navy agent, he was able to calculate should net him £500 per annum (*Papers* 233-34).

On 11 February Frank visited Lord Moira in London and was given a letter of introduction to Admiral Lord Nelson, who replied to Moira that he would give all the attention in his power to Capt. Austen, who was an excellent young man (*Family Record* 134-35). The 2nd Earl of Moira now makes his appearance as a patron of the Austen family.⁵ He was one of the foremost soldiers, politicians, and spendthrifts of his time, and was a close friend both of Warren Hastings and of the Prince of Wales. “Moira and I,” the Prince would say, “are like two brothers, when one wants money he puts his hand in the other’s pocket.” Unfortunately for Henry Austen, he was to lend money to this man.

Appointment to the *Canopus* did bring financial success to Captain Frank Austen. On 6 February 1806 he won prize money in the Battle of Santo Domingo, and on 5 March *Steele’s Navy List* carried the news that his action of 18 June 1799 in the *Peterel* was finally being paid out. He arrived back in England on 29 April to stay for a year, get married on 24 July, and move into lodgings in Southampton in September with Mrs. Austen, Cassandra, and Jane. Frank was also adventurous enough, and now affluent enough, to enter into a business partnership with the two Henrys of Austen & Co., thus forming the new banking entity of Austen, Maunde, and Austen. His partnership in the firm continued for the next seven years, even though he was necessarily away at sea for much of this time.

The year 1806 had opened with the death of long-time Prime Minister William Pitt, on 23 January. There was a realignment of political forces, and this opened up a whole new field of patronage, which gave Henry Austen’s career a major boost. In the new “Ministry of All the Talents” Lord Moira was appointed Master General of the Ordnance; Henry’s old colonel, Lord Charles Spencer, became Master of the Mint; Charles James became a major in the Corps of Artillery Drivers; and Charles Hastings, a cousin of Lord

Moira, was created a baronet. On 28 February Henry took out an insurance policy with the Society for Equitable Assurances for £2,000, paying an annual premium of £61-6-0 (Public Record Office). His growing affluence is illustrated by the £6,700 he had invested in the three-percent Consols in a Bank of England account, which makes his claim of a precarious income in the previous year rather suspect.⁶ A major professional advance came on 25 December, the beginning of the new financial year, when Austen and Maunde were appointed to the agency of two more regiments: the Derbyshire Militia and the 4th Garrison Battalion. The agency of the Derbyshires was in the gift of its colonel, Lord George Augustus Henry Cavendish, brother of William, 5th Duke of Devonshire. The colonel of the 4th Garrison Battalion, a newly formed unit based in Jersey, in the Channel Islands, was the new baronet, Sir Charles Hastings, a close friend of Warren Hastings though not a relative. Warren Hastings wrote to Sir Charles on 14 December thanking him for his “benevolent and effectual services to my friend Austin [sic] . . . you anticipated my solicitation in his behalf, so as to leave me a mere passive expectant of the good which you meditated for him, and I ardently desired” (*Historic Manuscripts*).

By late 1806 Henry had engineered a further quantum leap in his status: he himself became a partner in three country banks, and Austen & Co. (**Figure 1**) became London correspondent for two more. At this time swarms of new country banks were being established, stimulated by the great credit expansion of the Industrial Revolution, and by the French wars. The Bank of England functioned then only as a bank of London. Money for the everyday needs of provincials was provided by the country banks with their own issues of bank notes. Country banks also provided a connection with the London market for their customers, through a London corresponding bank.⁷ Henry’s first country bank was in Alton, Hampshire, a small market town with three streets and two thousand inhabitants. It was known for agriculture, hop plantations, and brewing, and Edward Austen Knight owned much property there. The bank was situated at 10 High Street, purchased in 1806, and had three partners: Henry Austen; Edward William Gray, a local grocer; and William Vincent, Gray’s uncle, who was also a partner in a bank at Newbury. An early £1 note of 14 March 1807 from the Alton Bank survives in the British Museum, and its serial number, 7,314, gives evidence of intense financial activity

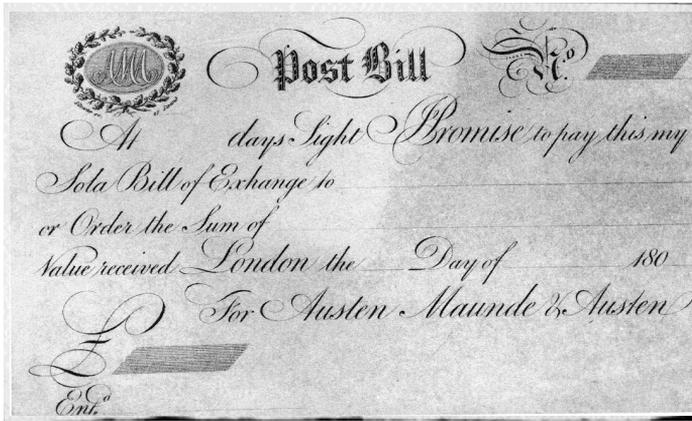


Figure 1: *Post Bill (blank), Austen & Co., London.*
© British Museum, CM 1981-11-22-14.

(Chartered Institute of Bankers Collection 7314). Another Hampshire bank was opened at Petersfield, a small agricultural, wool, and market town. Henry's regiment had wintered there in 1794-95 and he had probably come to know William Blunt, who had operated his family bank there since 1792. The place of business was at 13 Market Square, now the walkway of a shopping complex. The first partnership was Austen, Blunt, and William Stevens Louch, succeeded by Austen, Blunt, and Henry Clement. Louch may have left to operate the next bank, in Hythe.⁸ Henry Clement was presumably from the family of Thomas Clement, the Alton attorney, whose daughter Mary Anne was married to E. W. Gray's brother Fred. Blunt later became bankrupt, and Austen and Clement set up a third partnership with William Vincent of Alton and Newbury, calling themselves the Petersfield New Bank (**Figure 2**). The third country bank was in Hythe, Kent, then an excellent place for an army agency to open a bank. The bustling town faced the military might of Napoleon, across the English Channel. Sir John Moore trained his Light Brigade there, and in 1806 the town became the headquarters of the Royal Staff Corps. The Duke of York opened the Royal Military Canal, which ran from Hythe to Rye. To complement Henry's interest in wines, Hythe was also a center for cross-Channel smuggling. The bank's sponsor in Hythe was probably William Deedes, Member of Parliament for the town from 1807 to

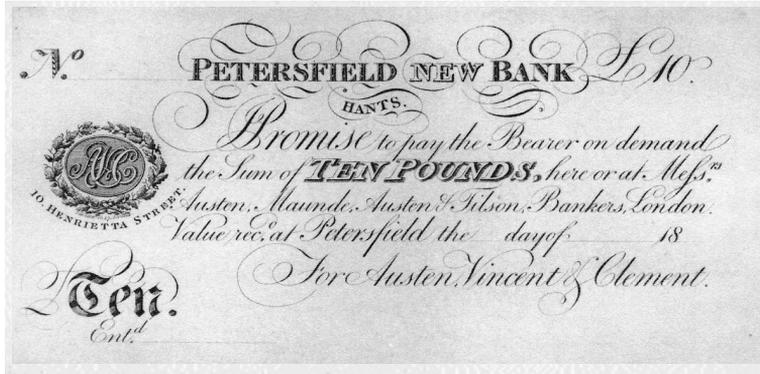


Figure 2: Ten Pound Note. Petersfield New Bank.

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1812, who was connected with the Austens through marriage. Henry's partner in this bank was William Stevens Louch, and the bank's premises were at 93 High Street, still known as Bank House in 1888, and still standing today.⁹ The annual rent was £20.

Austen & Co. in London was also a corresponding bank for two other country banks. One was the Horwood Well Bank (**Figure 3**), near Wincanton in Somerset. This bank was associated with the Horwood Well Spa, a speculative investment of Richard Messiter, which he hoped would become a rival to Bath and Cheltenham. For the accommodation of the patients a Banking House was built in a field a short distance away from the Spring House. It is said that Mary Anne Clarke was associated with Messiter in the establishment of this spa. The Horwood Well Water was heavily promoted and shipped to London to be sold. Generals Boyé and Rochambeau, prisoners on parole in Wincanton, wrote glowing testimonials for the water, and the sole London testimonial came from a neighbor of Henry in Michaels Place, Edmund Farrer. Alas, the *Salisbury Journal* of 5 February 1810 was to tell us that: "The Horwood Well Bank, opened about two years ago by Mr. Griffiths and the celebrated Mr. Donovan, has stopped payment; an event of no great importance, as there are few of their notes in circulation." If Henry was not intro-

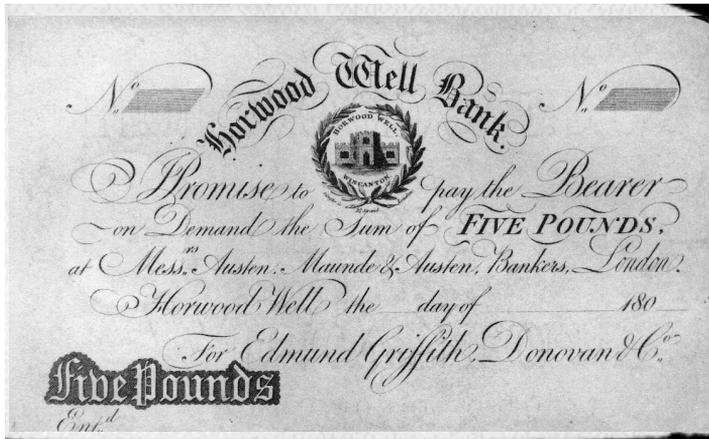


Figure 3: Five Pound Note. Horwood Well Bank.

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duced to this opportunity by Mary Anne Clarke, the initiative could have come from Colonel Gore-Langton, who represented East Somerset in Parliament, and lived at Newton Park, near Bath.¹⁰

Henry Austen's other corresponding country bank was the Buxton and High Peak Bank (**Figure 4**) in Buxton, Derbyshire, proprietors George Goodwin, Sr., and George Turner Goodwin.¹¹ Goodwin Senior had been a lieutenant in the Derbyshire Militia. Buxton itself was a project of the 5th Duke of Devonshire, who had built the splendid Crescent and an elegant pump room. The town had only nine hundred inhabitants, but as Continental spas were unavailable in wartime, it was hoped that another English spa would flourish, which it did, for a while. From surviving bank notes it seems that the bank issued about six thousand £1 notes in a year. There was not to be another bank in Buxton until 1857. Henry Austen had an affinity for spas: first Horwood Well, and now Buxton. He visited Matlock and Cheltenham, and retired to Tunbridge Wells. Of course, spas were where the idle rich congregated who were likely to be his customers. There is also a curious and continuing Austen connection with Derbyshire. *Pride and Prejudice* uses the true history of the Derbyshire Militia in the winter of 1794-95 (Breihan and Caplan). Its characters Wickham, Darcy, and Mrs. Gardiner grew up in Derbyshire, and



Figure 4: *One Pound note. Buxton & High Peak Bank.*

© British Museum, Chartered Institute of Banker's Collection, 334.

Elizabeth Bennet visited the county, though Jane Austen hesitated to write about places she had never seen. The Cavendish family favored Henry with the agency for the Derbyshire Regiment and with this connection with the Buxton bank.

On 22 June 1807 Frank Austen sailed to the Cape of Good Hope, not to return until January 1808. While he was away a Drawing Office account of almost £2,000 was opened at the Bank of England in the joint names of Henry Austen, Henry Maunde, and Frank Austen.¹² On 25 March 1808 Austen & Co. occupied new premises at 10 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, with a twenty-one year lease at £110 per annum (Public Record Office). The move signifies a shift from primarily army agency to primarily banking, with the new location providing easier communication with provincial farmers and traders coming into London to do business. A little later, on 15 June, Jane wrote a financial comment of some interest: "The brewery scheme is quite at an end: at a meeting of the subscribers last week it was by general, and I believe very hearty, consent dissolved." With the large London market, brewing would potentially have been very rewarding, and a natural extension to an interest in the wine trade. However, a large capital outlay was required to set up a brewery, with its buildings, vats, and the new steam engines, and appar-

ently the subscribers were unable to raise enough money. Alton would have been an excellent source for hops and malt. In October 1808 Henry and Edward were on the lookout for a home for their mother and sisters in the Alton area, and Jane suspected that a parcel of goods from Mr. Gray was intended to entice her there (*Letters* 1-9 October 1808), although the move to Chawton Cottage was delayed until 7 July 1809. Austen & Co. unfortunately lost the agency for the 4th Garrison Battalion on 25 December 1808, a new colonel employing another agency.

Nevertheless, Jane Austen was able to write on 11 January 1809 that: "The progress of the bank is a constant source of satisfaction. With such increasing profits, tell Henry, that I hope he will not work poor High-diddle [a bank clerk] so hard as he used to do." The three prospering partners now took on a fourth: James Tilson, a former partner in the Dorset & Co. Bank of New Bond Street, which had failed in 1803,¹³ and a brother of John Henry Tilson, Lieutenant-Colonel of the Oxfordshire Regiment. In February took place the parliamentary inquiry into the undue influence of Mary Anne Clarke over the Duke of York in the sale of army commissions, which caused the Duke to resign as Commander in Chief and cast a shadow over much army agency business. Still, some further increase in affluence allowed Henry and Eliza to move their home once again—in July, to 64 Sloane Street, in Chelsea. An almost two-year gap in Jane Austen's letters now follows, but on 9 March 1810 Austen & Co. lent Lord Charles Spencer £2,000 (Public Record Office), and in July of that year Frank Austen returned from a voyage to China in the *St. Albans*, which netted him a great deal of money and a special bonus of one thousand guineas from the East India Company (*Family Record* 163).

During the early part of 1811 *Sense and Sensibility* was accepted for publication by Thomas Egerton, and Jane Austen thus became a professional writer. Henceforth she made many visits to Henry in London to supervise the birth of her literary offspring. In a series of letters she wrote from Sloane Street in April (18-30 April 1811) we learn that Henry was confined to the bank the whole day on the 16th, went to the Admiralty on the 19th to get news of brothers Frank and Charles, and was trying to hurry Jane's printer. Jane visited galleries and theaters, and corrected proofs. Henry left for a visit to Oxford and wrote from Wheatfield, the home of Lord Charles Spencer. Spencer's

son John was Receiver of Taxes for Oxfordshire, and Henry would have been discussing his own Deputy Receivership. On 6 June, back at Chawton, Jane writes of a flying twenty-four-hour visit from Henry and James Tilson, which must have been on bank business, perhaps the move of the Alton bank from 10 High Street—sold in 1812 to Miss Mary Smith—to property adjoining Baker’s Alley (*Natproban* 31-32) E.W. Gray took over exclusive operation of the Alton bank at about this time. Austen & Co. added another regimental agency on 25 July—the Royal West Middlesex Regiment. The colonel was Edward Bayly, but the patronage may have been engineered by Major James, who had once been a captain in this corps. On 30 October 1811 *Sense and Sensibility*, after much delay, was at last published.

In 1812 Lord Moira almost became Prime Minister after the assassination of Percival, received the Order of the Garter from the Prince Regent, and was named Governor General of Bengal. Lord George Cavendish retired from the colonelcy of the Derbyshires on 9 June and was replaced by Winfield Halton, who fortunately continued to use Austen & Co. as agent. In the autumn Jane Austen sold the copyright of *Pride and Prejudice* to Egerton for £110, and the book was published on 28 January 1813. Her letter of 4 February, in which she describes the book as “rather too light & bright & sparkling,” also tells us that Henry is in Oxford again, now busy with his duties as Deputy Receiver. Between 12 and 17 April Lord Moira, while in Portsmouth awaiting his departure to India, wrote himself loans upon Austen & Co. totaling £6,000. An unexpectedly intimate view of the immediate aftermath is given in some letters Henry wrote twenty-six years later to Moira’s son:

My Lord, . . . Your Noble Father, when he left England for India in 1813 owed me £6,000. . . . I was in the habit of lending . . . from time to time sums of money on his notes of hand. They had always been duly paid up to the time of his departure. . . . Before he sailed, he sent for me into his private cabinet in St. James Place and uttered the following words: “I have . . . given directions to my trustees . . . to sell my landed property and pay every demand, although it is like drawing drops of blood from my heart.” . . . I reposed implicit confidence in his word. . . . Baron Adams requested a renewal for one year. . . . In April 1814 they

were not honoured. . . . my credit as a banker was impaired. . . . confidence withdrawn and business destroyed. . . . insolvency ensued in March 1816. . . . I lost the Receivership, an office of £1,000 a year. I lost everything. . . . (Huntington Library 23 May 1839)

and:

Baron Adams . . . repeatedly confirmed your father's promise. The last time he made it, it was in his own chambers at Lincoln's Inn. There were present Wm. Seymour Esqr., a solicitor of eminence, W. Hellyer Esqr., ditto, Mr. Ridge, your father's regimental agent, a Mr. Louch, T. P. Hampson Esqr., . . . Myself & 3 or 4 more . . . Not omitting a Major James, much in your father's confidence. (I have sometimes feared too much, as the Major was a papist, and had been educated at the Jesuits College at Douay.) Several of the above were creditors of your father and, I regret to say, thro my means. . . . (Huntington Library 23 August 1839)

John Ridge was the agent for the 27th Regiment of Foot (Inniskillings), of which Moira was colonel, Louch was Henry's partner at Hythe and Petersfield, and Thomas Philip Hampson was one of Henry's financial backers and a distant relative. Major James's reputation with Henry seems to have undergone a considerable change since the secret agreement of 1801. William Adam, a Baron of the Exchequer, was a canny Scot and a longtime political fixer. He had been one of the managers of the impeachment of Warren Hastings in 1791 and had handled the settlement of the debts of the Duke of York and of the Prince of Wales. He had acted with Moira to protect the Duke from Mary Anne Clarke in the scandal of 1809. Against him, Henry and the eminent Mr. Seymour had little chance. In the middle of this financial turmoil, on 22 April 1813, Jane Austen went to London to attend to Eliza in her last hours, and she died on the 25th. The day before, Henry had lent Lord Charles Spencer another £2,000 (Public Record Office), perhaps a final down payment on the appointment as full Receiver of Taxes for Oxfordshire, an event officially dated from 24 July. John Spencer, the former Receiver, had put himself into extreme financial difficulties, and after the peace had to reside in St. Omer, France, to escape his creditors. He became indebted to

Henry for £6,500 (Public Record Office). Jane described Henry's appointment (*Letters* 3-6 July 1813) as "A promotion which he thoroughly enjoys;—as well he may;—the work of his own mind." His financial empire had now reached its peak of affluence.

There were sixty-six Receivers General for England and Wales in an almost medieval system of collection.¹⁴ Their duties were to travel about their county on a quarterly, or more commonly on a semi-annual basis, in April and October, and to collect the proceeds of the Land Tax and the other parliamentary assessed taxes from the parish collectors. For safety it was required that they travel with two companions, usually a clerk and a servant. Their official recompense was a poundage of twopence on the Land Tax and a penny halfpenny on the other taxes. This would usually amount to one or two thousand pounds a year. However, the major attraction of a Receivership was the ability to hold on to the tax money and to put it to use in loans or investments before paying it on to government; hence, many Receivers were bankers. Holding the receipts for six weeks was the norm, but accounts did not require to be cleared until two years after the year of assessment, and enforcement generally was extraordinarily lax. Three men of property were required to post bond to guarantee the fiscal integrity of the Receiver: Henry's guarantors were Edward Austen Knight; James Leigh Perrot, Henry and Jane's uncle; and Thomas Philip Hampson. Like most entrepreneurs of his time, before the era of joint stock banking, Henry depended for his financing on private lending through extended kinship relationships. His one known attempt at public financing—the brewery—had not been a success. Henry's guarantors posted joint bonds of £73,000 on 24 July 1813, and again on 9 August 1814. A larger bond of £80,000 was required on 17 August 1815. The natural inducement was the hope of a very large profit.

Jane returned to London in May 1813 to assist at the removal of Henry, the new widower, from Sloane Street to Henrietta Street, where he was to live over the bank. She was present at the opening of a new account, to her great amusement (*Letters* 24 May 1813). In the summer Henry paid a visit to Scotland, where he seems to have combined business with pleasure. While there he met Lady Robert Kerr, who had warmly praised *Pride and Prejudice*, and he confided to her the secret that it had been written by his sister (*Letters* 15-16 and 25

September 1813). To her husband, Lord Robert Kerr, a son of the 5th Marquis of Lothian, he lent £100 on 20 January 1814. There were also other Scottish loans (Public Record Office). One was to Lord Balgonie, a friend of Charles Austen and a navy captain, but described as a poor man (*Letters* 550). Jane had met his parents, Lord and Lady Leven of Melville Castle, in Bath in 1805 (*Letters* 21-23 April 1805). Another loan, on 20 January 1815, was to Eric Mackay, 7th Baron of Reay, for £1,000. One more customer of interest (Public Record Office) was the notorious Earl of Barrymore, whose extravagant lifestyle was legendary. He was a neighbor of the Leigh Perrots in Berkshire (*Collected Reports* 393). Bankers would often lend money to people of substance, or to landed gentry, without collateral or security of any kind, and this was much of Henry's business, but he was most unfortunate in the choice of some of his clients.

On the way back from Scotland Henry stopped off at Matlock in Derbyshire (*Letters* 15-16 and 16 September 1813). Colonel Halton of the Derbyshire Regiment lived only a few miles away at South Wingfield, and Henry may also have met the Goodwins of the Buxton bank. Following his arrival home he suffered from various episodes of poor health: a pain in the face (*Letters* 15-16 September 1813), a "deranged" stomach (*Letters* 16 September 1813), and bile (*Letters* 6-7 November 1813) but still made his rounds in Oxfordshire (*Letters* 3 November 1813). He also laid out the money to pay for the second printing of *Sense and Sensibility*, as he had for the first (*Letters* 3 November 1813).

In January 1814 *Mansfield Park* was accepted for publication, and Henry began to read the proofs on 1 March as he escorted Jane back to London for another working visit. Jane went to the theaters and dined with Mr. Hampson and Mr. Tilson, both of whom were frequently found attending the Bank, and she notes an evening of business with Mr. Barlowe, an employee (*Letters* 5-8 and 9 March 1814). Barlowe had greeted them on their arrival in London with the news that peace was generally expected, and indeed, on 5 April the Emperor Napoleon abdicated and was banished to Elba. This was joyous news for everyone, but financially ominous for an army agent dependent on a war economy. There was an immediate reduction in the army establishment and a demobilization of regiments of militia. The regimental payroll handled by Austen & Co. declined from £112,000 in 1813 to

£63,000 in 1814, and £34,000 in 1815, the government naturally being eager to retrench from the crippling expense of the war.

The price of provisions fell, no longer buoyed up by the large military market. Agriculture began to be depressed, and the job market was flooded by discharged soldiers. Frank Austen was among those freed by the peace, and he left his ship the *Elephant* at Spithead in May. He immediately got together with Henry, and they made two joint investments on 16 May: a one-fiftieth share in the Westminster Society for Insurance, worth £4,000, and a £3,000 annuity (Public Record Office). At about this time Frank had given up his Bank partnership, probably after the expiration of seven years, which was the usual length of a partnership at that time. Thus Austen & Co. assumed its final shape: Austen, Maunde & Tilson.

In June Edward's family and Cassandra met Henry in London to help to celebrate the peace. In honor of Britain's twenty-year commitment to the defeat of Napoleon, both the King of Prussia and Tsar Alexander of Russia visited England, the climax of the festivities being a massive party and ball at White's, London's most exclusive social club. Henry attended this greatest of all celebrations, leaving us only to say, along with Jane Austen: "Oh, what a Henry" (*Letters* 23 June 1814). In the same letter we find Mr. Louch appearing as Henry's roving ambassador: his partner at Hythe, formerly at Petersfield, and the bearer of a letter to Jane from Alton.

In August Henry moved his home to 23 Hans Place, becoming a neighbor of the Tilson's at number 26. Jane talked to Mr. Tilson across the gardens (*Letters* 23-24 August 1814) and was very pleased with the house (*Letters* 2 September 1814). She continued to work with her publisher, Egerton, hoping to get his account for the first edition of *Mansfield Park* before she went away (*Letters* 2 September 1814), and on another visit in November seeing him to discuss a second edition (*Letters* 30 November 1814). In March 1815 she finished writing *Emma*, and Napoleon escaped from Elba to begin that one-hundred-days rule that ended at Waterloo on 18 June. Then came the first evidence of the involvement of Austen & Co. in the sorry business of Extents.¹⁵

When tax money was owed to the Crown, a writ of Extent in Chief could be issued, which reserved first call to the Crown on any assets of the debtor. Debtors to the Crown could in their turn issue writs of Extent in Aid, calling upon the assets of those owing money

to them. On 11 April 1815 Austen & Co. issued an Extent in Aid against James Harfield, a maltster and farmer of Candover, Hampshire, for a debt to them of £3,748. Harfield, his wife, and his seven children were then committed to the Fleet Prison for the next two years while he petitioned Parliament for relief.¹⁶

In October 1815 Jane Austen was at Hans Place again, negotiating with a new publisher, John Murray, over the copyright of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park*, and over the publication of *Emma* (*Letters* 17–18 October 1815). Henry became ill again—a bilious attack with fever—and this time his condition progressed to critical. Jane sent out warning letters, and Edward, James, and Cassandra all arrived to help. His illness came at a bad time, for the Alton Bank was failing. This is illustrated by the survival of three £1 Alton Bank notes, all from 11 October,¹⁷ for such notes would be hoarded in the hope of eventual redemption.

The bank failure was partly due to the unavoidable countryside depression, agriculture being the great prime mover of the economy, and partly due to the machinations of Edward Gray, who spun off all the bank's liquid assets to his own family and friends in anticipation of failure, leaving a balance in the bank of only sixteen shillings.¹⁸ One example is a payment he made on 25 November of £1,500 to Michael Rivers, a notorious insolvent. Austen & Co. issued an Extent in Aid against Rivers on 25 December in an attempt to get the money back.¹⁹ On 24 November Jane was still at Hans Place, and she wrote to Cassandra that Henry: “read me what he wrote to Edward;—part of it must have amused him I am sure;—one part alas! cannot be very amusing to anybody.—I wonder that with such business to worry him, he can be getting better.” The Alton Bank failed on 27 November as a result of Austen & Co. stopping its London payments. On 2 December Jane wrote that Henry had absented himself under Mr. Seymour's direction, probably related to the performance of a formal Act of Bankruptcy, which required an absence from home and business for the purpose of avoiding creditors. Edward Gray's bankruptcy followed on 21 December, and two days later Henry had to borrow £10,000 from Edward on a promissory note.²⁰ In the face of all this, there was only one piece of good news—the publication of *Emma* on 23 December.

Early in 1816, in the middle of all this trouble, Henry bought

back the manuscript of what was to become *Northanger Abbey* from the publisher Richard Crosby. He found Crosby very willing to resign all claim to the copyright (*Family Record* 210), understandable, since Crosby himself became bankrupt 2 March. Austen & Co. was also in deep trouble. On 13 March Jane Austen wrote a very cheerful letter to her niece Caroline mentioning that Henry and Mr. Tilson, and then Henry and Mr. Seymour had dropped into Chawton unexpectedly. On 15 March Extents in Chief were issued by the Crown against both Henry and Austen & Co. because of a debt to His Majesty of £22,743-8-10, owing from the Oxford Receivership. Next day the *Times* carried this sad announcement: “Yesterday the banking and agency house of Messrs. Austin[sic], Maunde, and Co., Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, we regret to state, stopped payment.”

There were several interlocking causes of this disaster. Because of the general postwar depression, bankruptcies of country banks, usually less than six a year, totaled thirty-five in 1816 (Pressnell 74). All the elements in Henry’s little empire failed: E. W. Gray owed £6,532 in notes of the Alton Bank, and £2,222 in cash; the Hythe Bank owed £3,200; the Petersfield Bank, £7,249, and William Blunt, £3,474; George Goodwin of the Buxton Bank owed £571; and Austen & Co. itself owed Henry £5,811 (Public Record Office; Corley). What a tangle! Henry, as seen in his letters to Moira’s son, blamed Lord Moira’s bad loans and resulting loss of confidence. At another time²¹ he blamed E. W. Gray at Alton: “I was not unsuccessful until rendered so by the conduct of those Gentlemen who unfortunately for me were my partners in the bank at Alton. Their mismanagement of that concern obliged me to close all my other concerns, and resign the respectable situation which I had held for some years of Receiver. . . . Conscious of no criminality I state my worldly failure without hesitation. . . .” On a third occasion, writing to James Leigh of Stoneleigh Abbey and repeatedly calling himself destitute, Henry is more forthright: “My insolvency was occasioned by the egregious folly of my partners in a country bank who dissipated ten thousand pounds and by the unexampled treachery of the Marquess of Hastings (once Earl of Moira) who has defrauded me of six thousand pounds” (Bearman). Faced with vanishing cash flow from his army agency, failing country banks, and outstanding bad personal loans, Henry held onto and used the Oxfordshire tax monies to bolster himself up until the entire edifice

collapsed.

So Henry Austen was now bankrupt.²² He had forty-two days in which to make under oath a full disclosure of his estate. For concealment of assets the death penalty was still on the books. The first of his statutory meetings before the Commissioners of Bankruptcy was held on 19 March, for the proving of his debts. On 2 April his creditors selected assignees from among themselves who would take over, administer, and realize his assets and possessions. Henry's assignees were Joseph Silver and Richard Taylor, army clothiers, of Charlotte Street, Bloomsbury. He went to stay for two weeks at Godmersham. The final meeting for full disclosure of his estate was on 27 April. If the assignees and a majority of the creditors were satisfied, a Certificate of Conformity would be issued that discharged the bankrupt man, now almost penniless, but at least debt free, to begin his life all over again. Henry received his Certificate of Discharge on 8 June, and since he was unable to pay a dividend even approaching ten shillings in the pound, he would have been allowed to keep just three percent of the value of whatever assets remained to him, to a maximum of £200. The whole capital and property of a failed banker was forfeit, with no concept of limited liability. Austen & Co.'s goods and chattels at Henrietta Street were inventoried and valued at £100; Henry's goods at Hans Place were valued to be sold at £200 (Public Record Office). It seems that the bonds of guarantee put up by Edward Knight, Mr. Leigh-Perrot, and Mr. Hampson were not at that time called upon, although the three certainly suffered grievous financial losses. In the 1817 Report from the Select Committee upon the Mode of Issuing Extents in Aid the following dialogue is recorded:

Who was the receiver general for the county of Oxford?

— Mr. Henry Thomas Austin [sic]

An Extent in Chief was issued against him?

— It was.

Was his property found sufficient to pay his debt to the Crown?

— It was not.

Were his sureties obliged to make it good?

— They have not yet been called upon. It is possible the whole of the debt to the Crown, or near the whole, will be recovered without calling on the sureties.... The

debt of Austin amounted to about £40,000 . . . the bank stopped before the Extent issued. . . . a calamity will be brought upon the customers of the bank, if there is not more than enough to satisfy the Crown debt. . . .

Would that have happened if you had properly inquired into the circumstances of Austin before he was employed as a receiver general?

— Inquiry was made; but . . . regard has not so much been had to the property of the receiver general. It is not exactly the property of the receiver general that qualifies him for that office, if he is in a condition to give the Crown satisfactory security.

(British Parliamentary Papers)

Jane Austen noted the “late sad Event in Henrietta St.” (*Letters* 1 April 1816), that Henry was at Godmersham (*Letters* 21 April 1816), and that he was going on a trip to the Continent with two of his nephews (*Letters* 9 July 1816). On 4 September she wrote to Cassandra that Henry was decided for Holy Orders. He was ordained Deacon on 21 December 1816, and appointed Curate at Chawton on 26 December, at the annual stipend of fifty-two guineas. His later career as clergyman, author, and schoolmaster has been well documented.²³ We know that it was his sad duty to ride beside Jane’s carriage on 27 May 1817 on her last journey to Winchester, and after her death on 18 July to help to arrange her burial in the Cathedral. In a touching last remembrance, Jane left a legacy of £50 to Henry, and another £50 to M. Bigeon, his housekeeper. Everything else in her small estate passed directly to Cassandra (*Letters* 27 April 1817). Henry paid a last tribute to Jane by arranging for the posthumous publication of *Northanger Abbey and Persuasion* in December 1817. For this he wrote the “Biographical Notice,” essentially the only biographical information we were to have about Jane Austen until James Edward Austen-Leigh’s *Memoir* of 1870.

An appropriate ending to this cautionary tale of Henry Austen’s financial rise and fall comes in a letter (*Papers* 282-83) he wrote to James Edward in 1828: “Should we become unexpectedly rich,” Henry writes, “no promise . . . would prevent us from . . . a discharge of the Debt. . . . But my dreams of affluence, nay of competence, are closed. . . .”

NOTES

1. John Williamson, *A Treatise on Military Finance*, 10th ed. (1809); "Some Cursory Remarks on Army Agency," *British Military Library or Journal* (1801): ii, 501-02; *General Regulations and Orders for the Army to 1st January 1816* (1816; rep. 1970); Charles James, *Regimental Companion* (1813) iv, 304-05; 39Geo111c69. Financial records of Austen & Co.'s army agencies in PRO: PMG 2/62-121.
2. Directories: *Post Office London Directory*; *Kent's London Directory*; *Holden's Triennial Directory*; and *Clark's New Law List*. Also F. G. Hilton-Price, *Handbook of London Bankers, 1667-1876* (1876; 1890-91).
3. This transaction of Austen & Co. is in PRO: E 144/77, a treasure trove of financial information on the firm first unearthed by Dr. Patricia Jo Kulisheck of Minneapolis.
4. *Letters* 27-31 December 1815; *Collected Reports of the Jane Austen Society, 1986-95*, 14, 79; Chris Viveash, "Lady Morley and the 'Baron so Bold,'" *Persuasions* 14 (1992): 53-56.
5. *DNB*; Major Ross-of-Bladensburg, *Rulers of India: The Marquess of Hastings, KG* (1893); *British Military Library or Journal* (1801): ii, 121-30. Nelson's letter to Moira of 30 March 1805 is in *Historic Manuscripts Commission* (1934) 78, iii, 240-41.
6. Personal communication, Elizabeth Ogborn, then Deputy Archivist, Bank of England.
7. Presnell, L.S., *Country Banking in the Industrial Revolution*. (1956); G. L. Grant, *The Standard Catalogue of Provincial Banks and Banknotes* (1977); T. Joplin, *An Essay on the General Principles and Present Practice of Banking*, 6th ed. (1827); George Leekey, *The Stamp Office List of Country Bankers* (1813).
8. For the bank location, and for information on William Blunt, I am indebted to Mary Ray of the Petersfield Historical Society. Blunt came from nearby Buriton, where a Rev. Louch was earlier Rector, so Louch may have been a local man. Four bank notes of this bank are in the British Museum: CM 1981-11-22-489 through 492.
9. Personal communication from Sue Cox, Hythe Librarian, and Mr. M. Lilley.
10. George Sweetman, *History of Wincanton* (1903) 204-07; William Gapper, *A few Observations on Mineral Waters, particularly Horwood Well* (1805 et seq.). Two notes of this bank are in the British Museum: CM 1981 11-22-234 and 235.
11. Ernest Axon, *Buxton Advertiser*, 27 October and 3 November 1934, 16 and 23 November 1940 (914.251 in the Derbyshire RO, Matlock). Four notes are listed in Axon, one is in the Derbyshire RO, and two are in the British Museum: CIBC, 344 and 5819.
12. Personal communication, Elizabeth Ogborn, The account reference number is C98/2917f 6171.
13. Personal communication, Tony Corley, University of Reading.
14. British Parliamentary Papers, *Report of the Select Committee on the Duties of the Receivers General of the Land and Assessed Taxes* (1821) viii, 15-183; 43Geo111c99 and c161. Receiver General Henry Austen's Oxfordshire returns are in the PRO: E181/42-44.

15. Pressnell, 69-71; British Parliamentary Papers (1816) xviii, 145-52; (1817) v, 137-306; xvi, 43-58; Austen Extents against Lord Moira and John Lewis E144/79, and against George Bulkley E144/81.
16. British Parliamentary Papers (1816) v, 148; xviii, 152.
17. British Museum: CIBC, 649, 942; Curtis Museum, Alton, 719.
18. PRO: B1/134, 253-57.
19. British Parliamentary Papers (1816) xviii, 152.
20. Hampshire RO: 18M61, box F6. I owe this reference to Tony Corley.
21. Hampshire RO: 21M65, E1/4/2601, 5 November 1816.
22. *London Gazette*, 16 March 1816:519. For bankruptcy see 5Geo11c30; British Parliamentary Papers, *Report from the Select Committee on the Bankruptcy Laws* (1817) v, 1-136; T. Williams, *Every Man His Own Lawyer* (1812) 301-65; E. Welbourne, "Bankruptcy Before the Era of Victorian Reform," *Cambridge Historical Journal* (1932): 51-62.
23. *Collected Reports of the Jane Austen Society, 1966-75*: 216-18; *1976-85*: 86-91.

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