



Mr. Lock: Hatter to Jane Austen's Family

DR. KENNETH CLIFF
AND MR. FRANK WHITBOURN

Frank Whitbourn is descended from the Lock family. A British Council Lecturer in Mexico, and Head of English, Collyer's School, Horsham, he wrote a *History of Mr. Lock's Shop*. Dr. Kenneth Cliff specialized in Public Health medicine and now researches Lock's ledgers. He has published papers on Lord Nelson's hats.

IT IS A TRUTH SUFFICIENTLY ACKNOWLEDGED in her letters and novels that Jane Austen was a very observant shopper. Memorable scenes are set in *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, and elsewhere. Her letters show that she enjoyed shopping with her mother and sister Cassandra when they all stayed in Bath, and in Bond Street when she visited her brother Henry in London. She had little money to spend and laid it out carefully.

Jane Austen looked for dress materials that would last; her watchword was "quality first." She tells us how she stitched her brothers' shirts, but she does not tell us where the family turned for other necessary "wearing apparel." Thanks to recent research we at least know where the Austen men bought their hats. Like their sister, they looked for quality. For them only the best was good enough, perhaps with a suspicion of snobbism. They bought them where "anybody who was Anybody" bought his hats: from James Lock, "Hatter to the Nobility and Gentry," in London, at No. 6, St. James's Street. This is made clear by entries in ledgers surviving at that address from as far back as 1783.

Mr. Lock's business, which is still there today, had in fact been established long before then. In 1676 a hatter from the City, Charles Davis, migrated on the tide of western development that

followed the restoration of Charles II to take advantage of proximity to the Court of St. James at the Palace. His son signed up a young James Lock, whose family held property nearby on the site of the present Malborough House, as his apprentice. In due course the apprentice married his master's daughter and inherited his business. This James Lock I was succeeded by his son, James Lock II, and his grandson James Lock III.

James Lock III master-minded the business from 1821 until his retirement in 1870. In 1835 a certain James Benning had been engaged as an apprentice. He subsequently became a trusted foreman. In 1865 James Lock III took his nephew C. R. Whitbourn into the shop. He and James Benning became equal partners as their master's successors in 1870, assuming his distinctive persona. Today No. 6 St. James's Street is maintained by their respective descendants, among whom are the present writers, though neither has assisted at the counter or in the counting-house. They themselves serve humbly and happily as historians.

Frank Whitbourn, C.R.W.'s grandson, published *Mr. Lock of St. James's Street*, "a biography with a difference" in 1970. In this he related how one of Lord Nelson's last acts before embarking on HMS *Victory* for the triumph of Trafalgar was to call at No. 6 to settle his account with Mr. Lock (54-5). More recently, James Benning's descendant, Dr. Kenneth Cliff, researching the history of the hats of officers in the Royal Navy from 1783-1805, discovered references to Nelson's earlier association with the shop. Among these were entries relating to a springtide of officers, one of whom was Jane Austen's brother Captain Francis Austen. Alerted by this he was soon on the track of other members of her family whom Mr. Lock had bowed to as his customers.

The earliest of these entries is dated 20 May 1783. It reads: "Mr John Austen at Broadford Kent; 2 Livery hats, silver lace 2in Musgrave; Double Silver Loops; band and binding. Colleyers's man at the Talbot Inn Southwark." The order was for a distant relative who was the son of one of Jane's great uncles also called John. On the death of great-uncle John's mother, Jane's great-grandmother, he was brought up by an uncle and aunt and eventually inherited his grandfather's estates (Tomalin 13-14). He had apparently little contact with his brothers and sisters, including

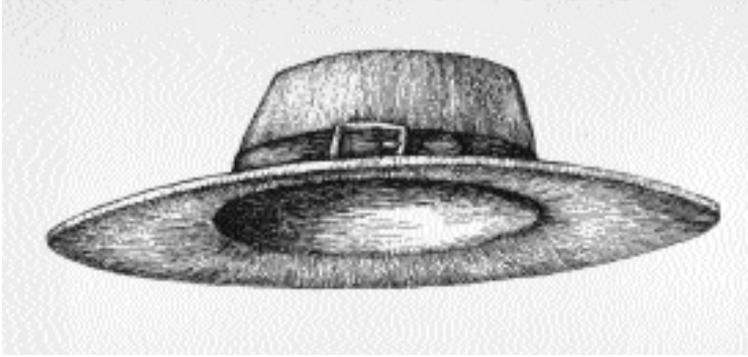


Figure 1: *The Round Hat*

Jane's favorite great uncle Francis, who became a wealthy solicitor.

John Austen was a regular customer of Mr. Lock and entries for hats can be found in 1784, 1786, and 1789. All the orders were for Livery Hats which were usually sent by Mr. Lock to the Talbot Inn Southwark for dispatch to Sevenoaks. The order for 1789, unusually, was sent from the Golden Cross Inn at Charing Cross.

The second entry dated 28 May 1783 reads: "Austen Esq; Court Lodge, Lambhurst, Kent; Thanet, band & binding 1-1-0. Colleyer's man to White Horse Borough to go by Marchant's Lambhurst Coach." Which of the Austen family this order was for is not known.

The third entry dated 9 August 1783 is of considerable interest, and reads: "Rev Mr Austen, 7 Oaks Kent; Thanet hat band & binding. 1-1-0." Was this Jane's father who was staying with his uncle Francis Austen at the "Red House"? Jane's family are known to have visited Francis Austen quite regularly. Though Jane's father ran a school, August would be a month when there were no pupils until the very end (Tomalin 22). Deirdre Le Faye suggests it was the Rev. Sackville Austen.

In the 1784 ledger there is an entry for "Mr Austen, Drawing Master in Knightsbridge." He came to Mr. Lock's shop on Sunday 16 May 1784 for a Beaver Hat. On 25 February 1786 a Mr. Austen of Worcester Place, Thames Street ordered a

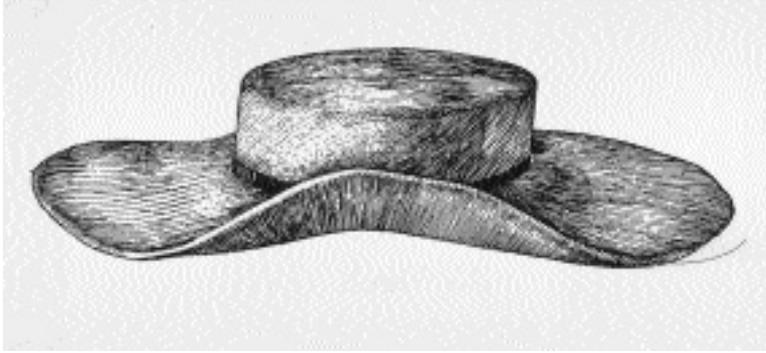


Figure 2: *The Flapt Hat*

Thanet Hat. This was a type of round hat with high crown, a precursor of the top hat. Whether these two gentlemen were relatives of Jane Austen is not certain.

By the late 1790s some of Jane Austen's elder brothers were ordering hats from Mr. Lock. Her brother James, now a clergyman at Deane, placed an order on 2 July 1796 as follows: "Rev James Austen, Deane, Hants, Round Hat, Wood box 1-5-0; a Pair of elastic straps 8/6." These latter, based on their price, were probably a pair of braces. Mr. Lock sold a number of items of clothing including socks and leather straps as well as hats, as a service to his customers, particularly to those going overseas in the "services."

The Round Hat was a very popular type of hat of the period. The basic style is shown in Figure 1 drawn by Mr. Ken Hutchinson. There were variations of this basic design and on 24 January 1798 the Rev. James Austen placed an order for "Bedford Hat, Size 7; Wood Box 1-7-0." The Bedford Hat had a taller crown than the basic round hat. He was to order a further Bedford Hat in 1799, still costing 1-7-0, with the wood box in which to store the hat.

To digress slightly, the purchase by the Rev. James Austen of this type of hat was unusual. The "standard" type of hat for a clergyman of that period was the "Flapt Hat." This was a variant of the Round Hat and is shown in Figure 2. The drawing is

again by Mr. Ken Hutchinson.

An entry for 9 March 1798 is of interest, as it proves that the Austen family continued to use Mr. Lock as their hatter, and Jane's great-uncle Francis in particular. The entry reads: "John Austen Esq, Oriel College Oxford; Round Hat; Wood box 1-7-0." John's father was Francis Motley Austen of Kippington (Honan 410), the elder son of great-uncle Francis.

John was to take holy orders and eventually inherit Broadford. On 4 July 1801 John Austen, now the Rev. John Austen, purchased from Mr. Lock another Round Hat and Wood box now costing 1-8-0. The address was given as "Kippington near Seven Oaks Kent." His father, Francis Motley Austen, had inherited the "Red House" on the death of his father Francis. He was to sell this house and move to a larger house at Kippington.

In the period 1800-05 there are other entries of historical interest referring to three of Jane's brothers. The first two refer to Edward who was adopted by Thomas Knight and his wife Caroline of Godmersham in Kent. Thomas Knight had lands in Steventon where the Austen family lived; he was a distant cousin of Jane's father. By 1783 at the age of sixteen Edward had permanently left the Austen family home to live with the Knights at Godmersham Park in Kent. In 1812 he adopted the name Knight (Honan 410).

Edward's first order was on 22 October 1800 for a "Round Hat and patch 1-6-0; 2in Fold and lining 3/-." The patch was to indicate that the "hat tax" had been paid. This tax was introduced in 1783 by William Pitt as a means of raising revenue. Pitt was also a customer of Mr. Lock. The hat was duly lined and the brim folded as ordered and dispatched by the messenger boy to the Blenheim Hotel, Bond St. where Edward was staying. Edward was now a wealthy young man. After the death of Thomas Knight in 1794, his wife Catherine assigned the estates of Godmersham and Chawton to Edward in 1796. His second order on 21 April 1802 shows that Edward came into Mr. Lock's shop to have a hat dressed, at a cost of 4/0. His address reads: "Edward Austen Esq, Godmersham Park."

Edward's association with Mr. Lock continued through his eldest daughter Fanny. She was Jane Austen's favorite niece to

whom she frequently wrote. Fanny married a widower, Edward Knatchbull, later Sir Edward the 9th Baronet. Edward's father, the 8th Baronet, was a customer of Mr. Lock. Sir Edward bought 2 Livery Hats on 25 May 1784 and again in 1786 and 1789. They were dispatched to Hatch Green, Ashford, Kent. An entry dated 28 July 1800 for "Two Livery Round Hat and duty 1-16-0" for a Mr. Knatchbull in Russell Place, London, who was to become Fanny's cousin by marriage.

The third order is for Captain Francis William Austen on 18 May 1805. The order reads: "Round Hat; Wood Box Size 6&7/8ths 1-11-0. Sent to Albany." Francis entered the Royal Naval Academy at Portsmouth in 1786. He then spent four years in the East Indies as a Midshipman, becoming a Lieutenant in December 1792. In this capacity he served for six years before attaining the rank of Commander, with some help from his father.

The Rev. George Austen had written to Admiral Gambier (Tomalin 144), a relative of Jane's brother James's first wife, Anne Matthew. Admiral Gambier apparently consulted with Lord Spencer, then First Lord of the Admiralty. This helped with Francis's promotion. Both Admiral Gambier and Lord Spencer were customers of Mr. Lock.

Francis served under Lord Nelson in the Mediterranean and met him on several occasions. Nelson commended him in a letter to Lord St. Vincent, who was then at the Admiralty (also a customer of Mr. Lock). Francis was then in command of the Sloop HMS *Petrel* and was ordered by Nelson to Malta (Nicolas 3: 364-5). Francis was also to write to Nelson about the state of his ship and the health of his men. Nelson noted all these points and clearly from later correspondence helped Francis "up the ladder" of his naval career.

Nelson again mentions Francis in a letter to Lord Moira of 1804 (also a customer of Mr. Lock). Nelson wrote: "You may rely upon every attention in my power to Captain Austen . . . he cannot be better placed than in the *Canopus*, which was once a French Admiral's ship, and struck to me. . . . he is an excellent young man" (Nicolas 6: 310). Francis was at this time on board HMS *Canopus* which in 1805 formed part of Nelson's Squadron which sailed after the French Fleet when it crossed the Atlantic



Figure 3: *Captain's Full Dress Naval Hat*

and threatened the British West Indies. At this time he was Flag Captain to Admiral Louis.

However, on 3 October 1805 Francis had a severe disappointment. He dined with Nelson on *HMS Victory* and as he and Admiral Louis were leaving, Louis turned to Nelson and said, "You are sending us away my Lord—the enemy will come out, and we shall have no share of the battle." This proved to be correct: Nelson had already written to the Admiralty on 2 October 1805 about his concern over the state of his fleet. To the Secretary to the Admiralty, William Marsden, he indicated his plan to send Admiral Louis with "six sail of line" to Gibraltar and Tetuan to replenish their stores (Nicolas 7: 62-3).

Francis was thus denied action at the Battle of Trafalgar on 21 October 1805. He was to go on to serve with distinction in the navy and became Admiral of the Fleet on 27 April 1863 (National Biography 1: 61). We have included a drawing by Mr. Ken Hutchinson of a naval captain's "full dress hat" which Francis would have worn when going on board *HMS Victory* to dine with Nelson. In 1805 such a hat cost £6-6-0 (Figure 3).

The remaining entry for 1805 was for James Austen. He was now at Steventon having taken over this Parish from his father

when the latter retired. The order for 9 July 1805 reads: "Rev. James Austen Steventon Nr Overton Hants. Round Hat 7&1/8 and Wood Box 1-11-0."

Currently we have been unable to trace any reference to Jane Austen's brothers Henry or Charles. Henry was to enter the Church when his banking business collapsed while Charles pursued a naval career like his elder brother Francis. For Jane Austen's family to have been customers of Mr. Lock was a surprising find. A link, perhaps, to what the brothers felt they must maintain as they moved in circles wider than the Steventon neighborhood. In a world of changing economic and political structures, in which Jane Austen's family, and the English gentry as a whole, was in the ascendance, how one presented oneself was of paramount importance, even down to the choice of one's hat.

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