



The Pemberley Effect: Austen's Legacy to the Historic House Industry

SARAH PARRY

Sarah Parry is Archive & Education Officer at Chawton House Library, Chawton, Hampshire. She is particularly interested in the history of the English country house and has worked as a volunteer Room Steward at Basildon Park and as a Guide at Blenheim Palace.

JANE AUSTEN'S LEGACY has been an important element in the absorption of many historic houses into popular culture in recent years. Austen now has a connection to many historic houses simply because an adaptation of one of her novels has been filmed at a particular property rather than because a historical link with Austen or her family exists. Newby Hall, the house that played the part of Sir Thomas Bertram's mansion in ITV's recent adaptation of *Mansfield Park*, for example, saw visitor numbers increase by approximately 10 per cent following transmission (Lambert 35). To illustrate how important the brand name of "Jane Austen" is to many of the houses that have appeared in Austen adaptations, I will highlight the effect of this connection on the house that played the role of Pemberley in the iconic 1995 BBC television adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* as well as on the house that played Netherfield Park in the 2005 Working Title movie *Pride & Prejudice*. Both these properties benefited from The Pemberley Effect: that is, transformation of a house from an important property, though one relatively unknown to the general public, to a property linked to the "Jane Austen" brand and all that this connection confers in terms of marketing and public awareness.



Why might historic houses wish to capitalize on any Jane Austen connection? A brief look at the history of the English country house since Austen's day is helpful in understanding the need for The Pemberley Effect.

At the end of the eighteenth century the role of the country house and its estate was still of great importance to the running and organization of society. Power and wealth were automatically seen as benefits of such ownership. The power of such owners was probably indisputable, but the wealth was sometimes not as great as outsiders might have suspected. For example, even Jane Austen's brother Edward, who had been adopted by the wealthy Catherine and Thomas Knight, experienced money problems with his estate at Chawton. A claim had been made on the estate by the Hinton family, who lived in the village. They believed that a deed relating to the estate was incorrect, that Edward was not the legal owner, and that the estate belonged to them. The case was not settled for several years, and eventually Edward had to pay £15,000 to pacify the Hintons (Tomalin 244, 332).

Taxes constituted another problem. By the end of the nineteenth century, increases in what are collectively known as "death duties" put increasing financial pressure on estate owners. The three forms of taxation that made up death duties were the Legacy Duty (from 1796 to 1949), Succession Duty (from 1853 to 1949), and Estate Duty (from 1894 until 1975, when it was replaced by Capital Transfer Tax) ("Death Duty"). These three taxes often proved crippling and were instrumental in causing the break up of many country estates.

Social changes put further pressure on the wealth necessary to maintain estates. The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 took large numbers of men and women away from the traditional male and female work roles. After the war, many who had previously been employed in domestic service were reluctant to return to the servant's role, as the war had often—although frequently through harrowing circumstances—broadened their horizons. Chawton House again provides an example of a property facing such pressures: in 1914 the then owner, Montagu George Knight, died. Death duties would have been payable on the estate, and the outbreak of war would have taken many men away from the estate to military roles. Montagu Knight's nephew, Lt. Col. Lionel Knight, inherited the estate, and by 1919 its breakup had started with the sale of 220 acres (Willoughby 10).

By the end of the Second World War, country houses seemed to be relics of a lost world. During the war many country houses were requisitioned by the Government for various military purposes. Basildon Park, which appeared

as Netherfield Park in the 2005 *Pride & Prejudice*, for example, was home in 1944 to the 101st Airborne Division, who were stationed there to prepare for D-Day (Simmons). Houses that were requisitioned were often badly damaged by the time they were returned to their owners. In addition, running repairs and general maintenance that should have been carried out regularly over the years had often been unaffordable. The dwindling numbers of people in domestic service contributed to this lack of maintenance, and with the ongoing demands of death duties, country houses appeared to have no future. By the 1950s country houses were being pulled down at the rate of several a week.

To many, the destruction of these houses simply represented the shift in society away from the all-powerful, landowning few, and their demise was sometimes seen as a necessary part of post-war Britain. During the late 1950s and into the 1960s, however, several enterprising country house owners decided to open their houses to the public. This venture was not wholly new, as there had always been a tradition of visiting at many of the great houses. Owners often produced written guides and had set opening hours. However, such efforts were not always successful. In a letter to Sir Horace Mann dated 30 July 1783, Horace Walpole wrote:

I am tormented all day and every day by people that come to see my house, and have no enjoyment of it in summer. It would be even in vain to say that the plague was here. I remember such a report in London when I was a child, and my uncle Lord Townshend, then secretary of state, was forced to send guards to keep off the crowd from the house in which the plague was said to be—they would go and see the plague. Had I been master of the house, I should have said, . . . “You see the plague! you *are* the plague.” (Tinniswood 91).

Such was the strength of Walpole’s indignation that by 1784 he issued visitors with a “page of rules for admission to see my house” (96).

So although the practice of opening a house to visitors was not new, there was, however, the need to operate on a more commercial basis, usually with increased opening hours and the provision of better facilities for visitors. Today many conservation bodies work hard to preserve and share not just country houses but all types of historic buildings and sites. The main organizations in Britain are: The National Trust, The National Trust for Scotland, English Heritage, Historic Houses Association, Historic Scotland, and CADW (which looks after many historic buildings and sites in Wales).



Although many of the houses that were once in danger of being pulled down have been saved, there are still many, particularly those in private ownership, that struggle on. All these houses, from the Chatsworths and the Blenheims right down to the smaller manor houses that are such an important feature of the English landscape and social history, require money. This need to generate large, regular incomes makes it more understandable why so many owners choose to rent out their properties as movie and television locations. Open days, specialist events, weddings, and corporate hospitality can all help to raise money, but they are relatively small sums compared to what movie or television production companies will pay to film at a property.

Fees vary depending on the budget and scale of the production, and house owners can be very coy about revealing figures. In January 1996, according to an article in *The Independent*, the Historic Houses Association recommended fees of £2,000 per day for movie work requiring the interior of a house and between £1,600 and £1,700 for exteriors. The Association also recommended that longer shoots should be subject to negotiation. When The National Trust agreed that Montacute House could be used in the 1995 movie of *Sense and Sensibility*, the fee was approximately £15,000 for 10 days filming (Jury). Once the movie or television program has been transmitted, visitor numbers to featured sites increase dramatically. So not only are properties getting paid for the initial use of the site as a film location, they also have the potential to market the property closely tied to the movie or program for a considerable period of time.

In August 2007 the UK Film Council highlighted a report called *Stately Attraction—How Film and Television Programmes Promote Tourism in the UK*. It revealed that “the locations most likely to inspire tourism are stately homes, historic and religious buildings, and rural or village landscapes”—all perfect requirements of any Austen adaptation! The report detailed how film location tourism had affected a number of properties: Burghley House in Lincolnshire, standing for Rosings Park in the 2005 *Pride & Prejudice*, experienced a 20% rise in visitor numbers; Basildon Park, which was used as Netherfield in the same adaptation, had an amazing 76% increase in coach tours to the property following its appearance on screen. However, these examples were as nothing compared to what happened when in 1995 Lyme Park hit television screens as Pemberley: before the series aired, the total number of visitors for the previous year was 32,852; after transmission, the visitor numbers reached a dizzying 91,437 visitors to the property in a year (“Stately Attraction”).

Further evidence of the effect that the 1995 adaptation had on public

imagination comes from Jane Austen's House Museum in Chawton. Following transmission of the series their visitor figures increased to 57,400 in 1996, "more than double the number for 1995" (Bowden 3). Although this rise means that more money is generated, such dramatic increases in visitor numbers do raise questions as to the conservation of historic houses. When opening to the public, there is always the difficult balance between accessibility for visitors and conservation of the house and contents. Money is generated through entrance fees and shop purchases, but more money will then have to be spent on maintaining the fabric and contents of the building. It is a difficult balance to strike.

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Though largely beneficial for the properties themselves, the effective casting of properties involves a certain measure of talent. The 1995 adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* was particularly successful, in part because the makers captured the hierarchy of the houses from the novel so perfectly in the production, especially in the case of Lyme Park, which played the exterior of Pemberley. In comparison, the makers of the 2005 *Pride & Prejudice*, in using Chatsworth as Pemberley, fell into the trap of presenting a well-known house as a fictional one. This casting had the effect of diminishing the realism of the movie and, because Chatsworth is so instantly recognizable, of unintentionally setting up a comic moment. The skill of the 1995 BBC version was in using a house that would not be instantly recognizable but that clearly would be in the league of someone like Darcy. As Lyme Park was not, at the time, a particularly well-known house to the general public, no previous baggage was attached to it. The estate therefore added greatly to the creation of not only Pemberley but of Darcy; the house and the actor could now be inextricably linked, and this effect was undoubtedly aided by the famous, or infamous, lake scene. Although the use of Sudbury Hall for the interiors of the 1995 Pemberley gave that property some of the "Pemberley" glory too, such is Lyme Park's popular fame as Pemberley that it even makes an appearance in the chick-lit novel *Me and Mr. Darcy* (Potter 278).

Lyme Park also appears on websites that have little to do with Austen, but even a fleeting mention of the property is enough to start reminding readers of the Austen connection. The BBC website "Breathing Places" offers readers "8,426 locations across the UK where you can get close to nature." The entry for Lyme Park includes the offering "wander lazily by the lake

(where Darcy and Elizabeth meet at Pemberley . . .)." The 24 Hour Museum website, which markets itself as The National Virtual Museum, unexpectedly juxtaposes the Austen connection and the actual collection and architecture of Lyme Park. The description of the house on this website contains the, by now, expected reference to *Pride and Prejudice*, but under the heading "Key artists and exhibits" it lists the important highlights for a visit to the property: "Lyme appeared as 'Pemberley' in the BBC's adaptation of Jane Austen's novel Pride and Prejudice; Mortlake tapestries; Grinling Gibbons woodcarvings; important collection of English clocks; Venetian architect Leoni." In this ordering of the important elements of the property, the fictional has overtaken the actual.

This redefinition of the property as set for *Pride and Prejudice* extends, naturally, to the grounds. A website listing "The National Trust Top Ten Picnic Spots for Summer" includes Lyme Park. The description of the property reads,

Lyme Park, Cheshire, which played a starring role as Jane Austen's 'Pemberley' in the BBC's adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, is a breathtakingly beautiful place for a picnic.

Lovers of the TV adaptation may know the park as the setting for the famous scene where Mr Darcy runs into Elizabeth Bennett [sic] after a quick dip in the lake, but for those of a more chaste disposition a tranquil Victorian garden, with roses, reflection lake and sunken parterre offer a perfect escape from the rigours of the modern world.



It's not surprising perhaps that The National Trust itself has begun to use these connections more systematically. I was unable to find material produced by The National Trust dating from 1995 when the television series that markets Lyme Park as Pemberley first aired. In comparison, the great amount of material produced a decade later for Basildon Park leads to the conclusion that in 1995 the Trust was unprepared for how popular Lyme Park would become following the transmission of *Pride and Prejudice*. Since Lyme Park's fame as Pemberley seems to have taken on a life of its own, apparently little now has to be done to keep its identity as Pemberley uppermost in popular culture.

The marketing expertise of The National Trust has grown. In 2001 the Trust launched a tape and CD featuring the actress Helena Bonham Carter

reading extracts from Jane Austen's novels. The recordings took place at Fenton House in London, another Trust property, and the marketing department gleefully took the opportunity of noting in an article in *The National Trust Magazine* of Spring 2001, "The recording is at the Trust's Fenton House, in Hampstead, the seventeenth-century gentleman trader's house that looks and feels as if *Emma*'s handsome Frank Churchill has just walked through its gates" ("She's Got It"). Within the same article was a list of Trust properties that had, since Lyme Park's starring role as Pemberley, made appearances in other Austen adaptations: Fenton House and Osterley Park in the 2000 *Mansfield Park*; Saltram House, Compton Castle, Montacute House, and Mompesson House in the 1995 version of *Sense and Sensibility*; Lyme Park and the village of Lacock in the 1995 *Pride and Prejudice*; Claydon House in the 1996 Paltrow/Northam version of *Emma*. In addition the author was quick to point out that Box Hill, the Assembly Rooms in Bath, and Blaise Hamlet are all mentioned in various Austen novels and that these properties are also now owned by the Trust.

In 2004 The National Trust was asked to allow Basildon Park to play the role of Netherfield Park in the Working Title version of *Pride and Prejudice*. The production required the exterior and interior of the house. Clearly the Trust had now learned many lessons as they made a decision that surprised the historic house world. This project was, I think, the most striking example to date of The Pemberley Effect because this time the Trust was prepared for how the "Jane Austen" brand name would affect the property. Allowing exterior and interior filming at Basildon would make marketing the property as Netherfield much easier, but it also required the closure of the house for several weeks in order to store objects, build sets within rooms, film, and then return the house to normal. The Trust had never before closed a house during the visitor season as they could not afford to lose the visitor income. By the time this project was suggested to the Trust, and because of their experiences with other properties used as locations for Austen adaptations, they knew that they had the potential to recoup these losses through the impact that the film would have on the property, especially in the way that they could market the property once the film had been released.

The National Trust geared up for a huge campaign to promote Basildon as Netherfield. The National Trust's own brand image is very strong and well known. The dark green background, white lettering, and the oak leaf logo have been used for many years, and by adding the "Jane Austen" brand name to interpretation and promotional literature the message that they wanted to

communicate became very strong. When the movie was released, new interpretation within the property was installed to connect it even more strongly with the “Jane Austen” brand, mainly through an exhibition about the making of *Pride and Prejudice*. As necessity dictated, this exhibition moved around the house in subsequent visitor seasons, but in 2008 it was given a new, permanent home in a part of the property that had once been one of the service wings.

During the special Jane Austen Weekends held in the summers at Basildon Park since the movie was released, many of the staff dress in Regency costume, there are Regency-themed displays and talks within the house, the soundtrack from the movie is played along part of the visitor route through the house, and there is a Jane Austen-themed children’s trail. These events all help reinforce the fantasy that this house is Netherfield Park. Through the consistent use of images from the movie in the property leaflet and in the shop, this message is continually present. An important part of any historic site as it brings in more revenue, the shop at Basildon Park includes an area dedicated to Austen-related merchandise, incorporating a still from the movie within the display. Such is the thoroughness of the Jane Austen interpretation levels at the property, that it is difficult to visit and not be aware of this connection.



The use of Lyme Park in the 1995 BBC version of *Pride and Prejudice* was a turning point in the way that historic houses have since been featured and marketed in adaptations of Jane Austen’s work. Towards the end of the 2008 visitor season, I visited Basildon Park again. The Dining Room, which featured strongly in the 2005 movie, particularly in the Netherfield ball scenes, was being used as a temporary textile conservation studio to enable work to be done on the curtains that hang in that room. An interpretation board explained the work that was being done and why the curtains needed to be conserved. It also referred to the 2005 adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, stating that the money for the conservation project had come directly from income raised by using the house as a location for the movie. What a wonderful legacy for the “Jane Austen” brand to bequeath to this particular property!

Publicity for *The Duchess*, the recent film based on Amanda Forman’s biography of Georgiana, fifth Duchess of Devonshire, suggests something of what the Trust has learned since 1995 but also some over-simplification of its history. An article published online by *The Telegraph* contained the following comment made by the Property Manager of Kedleston Hall, a Trust property featured in this film:

The National Trust has become a lot less precious. . . . Ten years ago, there was no way a film crew would have been allowed in here. Now we see it as really good publicity. I think the sort of people who go to see costume dramas are the sort of people who might come to houses like this. (McClarence)

When measured against the background of the history of the English country house in the twentieth century, this comment that the Trust has become “less precious” is unfair. The National Trust has worked hard to save, preserve, and open to the public as many properties as possible. Indeed, the Trust has come to understand the role that historic houses now play in popular culture as well as in providing the traditional places of escape and refuge for many visitors. A sense of place is something that all historic sites can offer, but what that sense of place is can be deeply personal to each visitor. Because visitors come with a myriad of expectations and preconceptions, interpreting historic houses is very difficult.

I have been lucky enough to work in three very different historic houses, and the questions that I have been asked more than any other are these: How much is a particular object worth? Are there any ghosts? Has a movie or television program been made at the house? Movie and television tourism is now hugely popular, and The National Trust has clearly overcome any qualms about allowing filming in their houses. They continue to use the “Jane Austen” brand to promote their properties, and on their website a page devoted to “Jane Austen Film and TV” contains the following statement:

If you’re a Jane Austen fan, the names of the settings in her stories are as readily recognisable as those of her characters. Ever wished to take a peek inside “Netherfield” or admire “Pemberley” from across the lake? It’s easier to follow in the footsteps of Lizzy and Darcy, Elinor and Marianne than you might think. . . .

With the combined appeal of Austen’s work and the time travel qualities of visiting historic houses, it is an invitation that is hard to resist.

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