

## News from St. Nicholas' Church, Steventon



### Steventon, Hampshire

It is a great honour to be invited by your regular correspondent, Joyce Bown, to contribute some items of news for the 1995 edition of *Persuasions*. Over the three years that I have been Rector, Joyce has kept me very well informed of all the interest and generous support members of JASNA have shown—and, indeed, continue to show—for Steventon, its church and the Austen heritage. So I am delighted to be able to establish a link with you all in this way and to record sincere thanks and warm greetings from everyone at St. Nicholas'.

Through various channels the Austen heritage at Steventon has received special attention and interest this year. The village can now proudly proclaim the existence of its church as the three mediaeval bells have been re-tuned and re-hung. A most joyful sound calls worshippers to the church. A special prayer of rededication and thanksgiving was offered on Sunday, February 12; a plaque is displayed by the West Door indicating the generous support of JASNA, which enabled the work to be undertaken. Everyone is delighted with the result and no one is at all likely to echo Maria Bertram's comments in *Mansfield Park* about the bells at Sotherton: "The annoyance of the bells must be terrible." Far from it! We even greeted the return of the bells with a concert—"In Praise of Bells"—an event greatly enjoyed by a large audience of Jane Austen enthusiasts on a very warm summer's evening.

In addition to the bells the village has also grown accustomed to the presence of television cameras and radio crews. This autumn's highly-acclaimed television dramatisation of *Pride and Prejudice* generated a number of accompanying programmes and Pam Ayres (well-known for her poetry) walked through the village in the company of Atherton Harrison (a local JAS member) on a hot August afternoon. They also visited the church to meet the Revd. George Austen's present successor. The result gave us half an hour of a programme on BBC Radio 2 entitled "Putting Jane Austen in Her Place." A further television programme is due for transmission on October 23 and this will almost certainly have something further about Steventon.

I am sure you all share our delight in these activities and we do extend a warm welcome to anyone from JASNA to visit us should you be in England during the coming year.

**Michael Kenning**  
Rector, St. Nicholas' Church