



## Derbyshires Corresponding: Elizabeth Bennet and the Austen Tour of 1833

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Emma Austen-Leigh's diaries and letters brought Kelly M. McDonald to Winchester, England, in May-July 2007, and resulted in "Edward Austen's Emma Reads *Emma*" (*Persuasions* 29). A member of the National Coalition of Independent Scholars, Kelly keeps a research blog at [SmithandGosling.wordpress.com](http://SmithandGosling.wordpress.com). She serves JASNA as Vermont's Regional co-Coordinator.

AT THE END OF *Pride and Prejudice*, readers learn that Darcy and Elizabeth "were both ever sensible of the warmest gratitude towards the persons who, by bringing her into Derbyshire, had been the means of uniting them" (388). The Gardiners may have *planned* an extensive Lake District trip, but Mrs. Gardiner's particular longing *delivers* them to the one Derbyshire neighborhood already known to her: "The town where she had formerly passed some years of her life . . . was probably as great an object of her curiosity, as all the celebrated beauties of Matlock, Chatsworth, Dovedale, or the Peak" (239). That Pemberley is not five miles from her town of Lambton of course adds that estate to their list of sights to see. Austen the narrator emphasizes, "It is not the object of this work to give a description of Derbyshire, nor of any of the remarkable places through which their route thither lay; Oxford, Blenheim, Warwick, Kenelworth, Birmingham, &c. are sufficiently known" (240). A fine summation for 1813, but today's readers may welcome illustrative images to help envision what this trip north then had to offer.

Countless travel books describe aspects of the journey, from the quality (or otherwise) of the roads, to the misdeeds or miseries of individuals, to Baedeker-style recommendations for anyone's trip. In this essay, however, the emphasis is on a small band of travelers, relatives through marriage of Jane's nephew and first biographer, James Edward Austen-Leigh. In September

1833, Edward (as he was known within the family) visited Derbyshire with his wife, Emma, as well as her mother, brother, three of her five sisters, and his younger sister, Caroline. Where did they go? Matlock, Chatsworth, Dovedale, and the Peak—the very places toured by Elizabeth Bennet in the novel published twenty years before.

Emma Austen's pocket diary lays out the route, and a letter by her youngest sister, Maria Smith, to absent sister Charlotte Currie narrates their Derbyshire days. The party of ten, including servants Chatterton and Tidman, left from their Hertfordshire home "in the Barouche & our Chariot" (Austen-Leigh). They reached Leamington Spa, just outside Warwick, in time to overnight at the Regent Hotel. From Longbourn, Elizabeth and the Gardiners follow the itinerary Emma Austen knew well; and, unlike Elizabeth, who professes a lack of artistic ability, Emma could produce sketches from the stops at Oxford, Blenheim, Warwick, and Kenilworth. Maria even tantalized Charlotte with a well-placed sentence about these souvenirs: "I think when [the sketches] are finished you will admire some of Emma's very much" (Smith).

"Ed: Maria Caroline & I saw Warwick Castle—left Leamington saw Stoneleigh Abbey," declares Emma's hectic September 11th entry. "We then went to Kenilworth Castle & came through Knowle to Birmingham" (Austen-Leigh). Perhaps numbered among the great houses that weary Elizabeth Bennet, Stoneleigh Abbey's familial ties certainly attracted the Edward Austens, though there is no mention of whether they entered the house or merely traversed its park. Jane Austen herself, in 1806, visited this estate belonging to the senior branch of the Leigh family, her mother's relations, when the Rev. Thomas Leigh, who anticipated inheriting it following the death of its aged owner, whisked his cousins off to Warwickshire (*Letters* 618; *Le Faye* 330-32).

In industrial Birmingham, Elizabeth Bennet's tiring circuit through great houses would have undergone quite the change of pace if she, like the Smiths, observed the plating of knives, the making of button shanks, and the stamping of crests upon livery buttons. Fascinated by machines of the steam age, tourists frequented such sights as Thomason's silver plate manufactory and Jennings's papier-mâché manufactory (which, at the time of Elizabeth's tour north, belonged to that innovator of the industry, Henry Clay). Nineteen-year-old Maria Smith was especially captivated by papier-mâché *furniture*: "it is so curious how a thing looking merely like a great piece of blue pasteboard is converted into a substance almost like wood only by dipping it into some preparation, & it is formed into the shape desired by fixing it when wet. . . . I

did so long to give Mama a table, for she admired them exceedingly & they were most exquisitely painted in birds & flowers.”

Industry, however, ushered in pollution, abject poverty, even apathy. Mary Brunton, whose novel *Self-Control* Jane Austen tried “in vain” to get in 1811 but “looked over again” in 1813 (30 April 1811; 12 October 1813), held decided opinions about this burgeoning metropolis, calling it “Birmingham, the ugly and the dull!” Her 1815 journal records the existence of a “poor manufacturing village called *Mud-city*, inhabited by creatures whose savage habits made them till lately the terror of travellers.” Their come-lately savior was one “Mr Hill, a neighbouring squire, who has built and endowed a church, and has established a school among this horde of barbarians” (Brunton 155-56).

“Tried to see Thomason’s manufactory. Nobody was at work; first, because it was Monday, and all last week’s wages were not spent; secondly, because it was a *wake*. . . . In the evening we laboured through many of the rugged streets of this wearisome town” (156). The following day Brunton succeeded in inspecting Thomason’s, and she explained its button shank machine. “One part of it pushes forward the wire; a second bends it into a loop; a third cuts it; a fourth flattens the points that they may join the better with the button; a fifth pushes the *eye* when completed out of the machine.” Her closing comment provides a clue to the rationale behind the tourist appeal: “After all, the movement does not seem very complicated; if I could have had it by myself for half an hour, I think I might have fully understood it” (157).

A portrait of the region between “the vile hole” Birmingham and the iron foundries of Colebrook-dale develops as Brunton observes that the countryside “seems pretty, so far as the smoke of 10,000 furnaces would allow us to see it” (156, 159).

With Lichfield the next place of consequence on the route north, Elizabeth Bennet and the Gardiners presumably tour its cathedral. Emma Austen commented on its 400-foot length, while Maria Smith—obviously in a quandary—denigrated its nave for being “too narrow inside for its length” but complimented its rich ornamentation inside and out, comparing it favorably to Westminster Abbey. She found all the white stone “rather wants relief, tho’ I like it,” and admired the cathedral’s “German painted glass windows” (Smith).

So onward to Ashbourne, with Alton Towers and Ilam Hall within easy distance. Alton Towers, belonging to Lord Shrewsbury, caused Maria to pronounce Tidman “delighted with the manufactories, but,” she remarked, “I have been so provoked since at his want of taste—he would not go 10 yards to see a



Figure 1: *After George Cuijt, View in Dovedale, Derbyshire (c. 1797-1820).* © Trustees of the British Museum.

splendid garden at Alton, & we could not persuade him to walk all thro' the Dovedale: he thought it all seemed much the same, so he sat down contentedly on a bench to wait our return!" Sheepishly, she acknowledged in a footnote, "I find since that he was very tired." Possibly like Mrs. Gardiner "not a great walker" (*PP* 254), and in lieu of a helpful, supportive arm, Tidman may have found the rest physically necessary.

The dramatic scenery of "insulated rocks, standing up on end like towers and spires," caused one tourist to "regret having had only a glimpse of this extraordinary scenery, which is more Scotch than any thing we saw in Scotland. The name had deceived us, but it has much more of the character of the eagle than of the dove" (Simond 117-18). (See Figure 1.) The river Dove tempted Edward Austen, as avid a fisherman as Mr. Gardiner, to try his luck with locally-made fly lures. Of his success, Maria reports that he "tried in vain to allure some trout." Perhaps his ill-luck was payback for the little boy Edward had procured as guide for the ladies: "Mamma picked up an old woman who was a much better & more intelligent guide—our boy scarcely seemed to have two ideas in his head, but at least he did to carry the cloaks & campstools & we tried to make the most of our time in drawing." They had taken a fly to reach the Dovedale, but proceeded along a minor footpath for their "four or five mile



Figure 2: *After Edward Dayes, View of Buxton (1794).* © Trustees of the British Museum.

walk” (Smith), a circuit worthy of comparison to Pemberley’s longer routes. Despite the hike, the Dovedale delighted all but Tidman.

They continued “to Buxton, in the most dreary deserted country” Maria “ever saw—I could not stay there!” Emma recorded that after “changing horses at Newhaven it was dark when we arrived & the place was so full that we were obliged to go to a very indifferent inn the Eagle” (Austen-Leigh). Such an easy tale belies the struggle the party had over finding *any* accommodation. Maria informed Charlotte, “The 6 best Hotels were quite full, it was very late on Sat<sup>dy</sup> night, & we were therefore most thankful to find rooms at the Eagle, the coach Inn” (Smith).

Maria’s letter reveals the reason behind the difficulty: Buxton is “where the Manchester people resort to from Sat<sup>dy</sup> to Monday.” After all that trouble, she pronounced, “the company was excessively odd, & the inn but mediocre—Buxton is a most curious place.” (See Figure 2.) No wonder Elizabeth Bennet accepts with great contentment her aunt and uncle’s companionship, for all three have “a suitableness which comprehended health and temper to bear inconveniences—cheerfulness to enhance every pleasure—and affection and intelligence, which might supply it among themselves if there were disappoint-

ments abroad" (*PP* 239-40). Compatibility was vital, and just as Elizabeth suits the Gardiners, well-seasoned tourists like the Smiths functioned as one unit. Maria, in a position to judge as the two sometimes slept together, commented with significance that "Caroline Austen is a sweet & most accommodating companion" (Smith).

En route to Matlock (where they stayed overnight at the Old Bath Hotel), the Austens proceeded along a "wild road" to Castleton, overtook the "shivering mountain," and ultimately explored the Peak Cavern (Austen-Leigh). "You may think of us perched at the top of the peak thus," teased Maria, drawing Charlotte's attention to a minute sketch of a mountain peppered top to bottom with people. "[O]r penetrating into the inmost recesses of its cavern" (Smith). Period guidebooks depict the many beauties—and terrors—of the Peak Cavern, "one of the principal wonders of Derbyshire." One writer, the Rev. R. Ward, instructed readers, "It is approached by a path along the side of a rivulet, which issues from the cavern. . . . Its mouth is a stupendous canopy of unpillared rock, exhibiting the appearance of a depressed arch. . . . Within this gulph some twine-makers have established their manufactory and residence" (Ward 204). (See Figure 3.) "It ranges entirely in limestone strata, which are full of marine exuvia, and occasionally exhibit an intermixture of chert. In extremely wet weather this cavern cannot be visited, as the water fills up a great part of it, and rises to a considerable height, even near the entrance" (207). The Smiths and Austens were lucky to be able to go inside since "there has been a great deal of wet & I suspect this is often the case in this part of the world" (Smith).

Slightly disappointed, and perhaps having entered with guidebook expectations, Maria thought the cavern "very curious, but I did not see Derbyshire Spar shining on its sides & roof as I expected." In its natural state, Derbyshire spar snakes in blackish veins between the limestone strata. A popular element for ornamental work, it is also known as Blue John since its most prized color is a banded palette of blues-purples. Once carved, polished, and crafted into trinkets, jewelry, vases, or goblets, Derbyshire spar takes on glass-like luminescence. When the change of plans (from Lakes to Peaks) makes her reflect upon Darcy's home county, Elizabeth Bennet visualizes Derbyshire spar in the context of souvenirs: "But surely . . . I may enter his county with impunity, and rob it of a few petrified spars without his perceiving me" (*PP* 239).

Maria's narration of their tour of the cavern shows her powers of observation at their most delightful. "Part of it is very low, but the path, tolerably

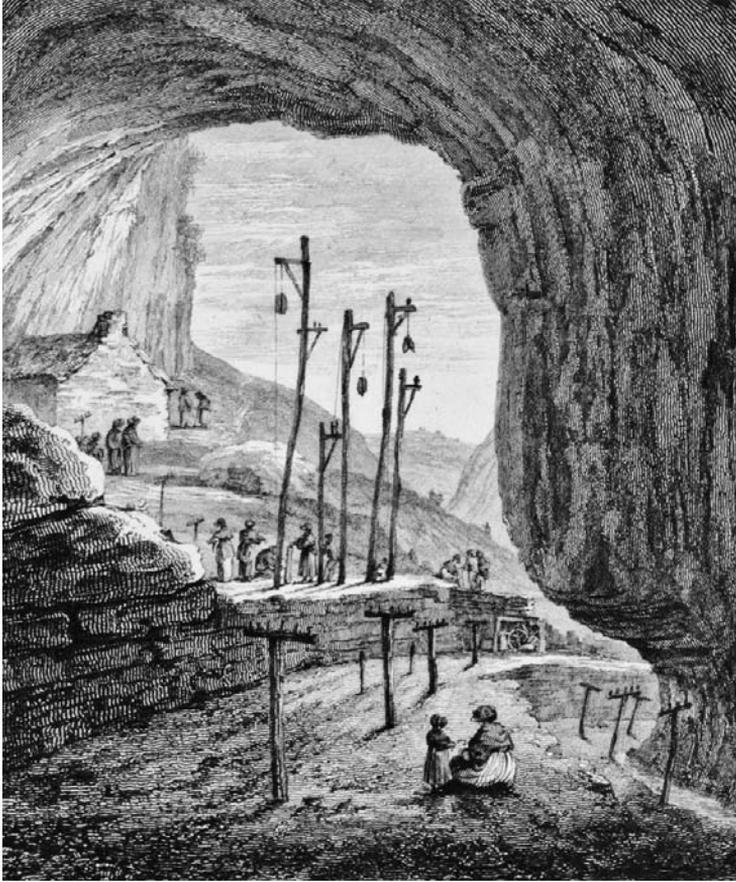


Figure 3: *After Francis Chantry, R.A., View from within Peaks Hole near Castleton, Derbyshire (1822).* © Trustees of the British Museum.

good. . . . [W]hen we had got some way, we came to a little boat in wh<sup>ch</sup> we were packed two at a time lying quite flat, without any bonnet, with a little tallow candlestick in the hand of each.—It was quite irresistible to see Tidman laid prostrate.” Deep into the cavern now, with the tallow candles burning and dripping, which Maria thought made them all “look just like a row of nuns . . . doing penance,” the tourists were shepherded together. “They lighted Bengal lights for us in some of the highest parts of the roof it had a very fine effect but they had not time to illuminate the cave.” A well-judged coda reassured Charlotte: “There is no danger in seeing the cavern & we thought it repaid the trouble of walking  $\frac{1}{2}$  a mile & back thro’ it” (Smith).

The Austens and Smiths then headed back to the open road. “I cannot tell you how ugly all the country from Buxton to this place, (Edensor), was today, just like what I before described & almost totally uninhabited: the road was cruelly hilly for the poor horses, but on entering this valley, it is very grand, the sides being lined with sort of fortification looking lime kilns from w<sup>h</sup> issue volumes of yellow smoke” (Smith). At long last, they reached Chatsworth—a highlight of the Austen trip, though a lesser one than Pemberley had proved for Elizabeth.

“[I]t is usual for those, whose curiosity leads them to visit Chatsworth, to leave their equipage at a handsome inn erected at Edensor on the border of the park, and to walk thence to the house” (Ward 110). (See Figure 4.) So Elizabeth, arriving at Pemberley in a carriage, approaches as a guest might, rather than as a tourist should. If modeled upon Chatsworth, Austen’s Pemberley remedies that estate’s one perceived defect. Maria Smith *twice* insisted that Chatsworth “is a magnificent looking Italian house in a fine park, but we are rather disappointed in its situation . . . for it stands decidedly low.” Emerging from Pemberley Woods, Elizabeth spies the manor house, “a large, handsome stone building, standing well on rising ground” (*PP* 245). Austen even improves upon Chatsworth, whose “park is said to be nine miles in circumference” (Ward 120). Pemberley’s longest circuit, of course, is *ten* miles (*PP* 253).

It has been suggested that Elizabeth Bennet changes her mind about Mr. Darcy once she sees his big house. Austen, however, is specific: the owner’s *refined taste* helps alter Elizabeth’s attitude as does the warm opinion of Mrs. Reynolds, the housekeeper. Pemberley is surely known to Elizabeth beforehand, by reputation if nothing else. Travel memoirs, engravings too, documented stately houses for the masses. Perhaps not counted among the “great” estates, Pemberley’s size and consequence, as well as the graceful compliance of Mrs. Reynolds, suggest that tourists do seek entrance at least occasionally. The elegant landscaping alone would draw visitors, for gardens were as popular as the dwellings they enclosed. “When all of the house that was open to general inspection had been seen, they returned downstairs, and taking leave of the housekeeper, were consigned over to the gardener, who met them at the hall door” (251).

While Elizabeth believes Pemberley unoccupied, the Austens knew the Duke of Devonshire’s family to be in residence; they even encountered “Lord & Lady Cavendish & their two dear little children . . . walking out in the garden as well as Lord Morpeth” (Smith). How natural a meeting, then, between Elizabeth and Darcy when Pemberley’s “owner . . . suddenly came forward

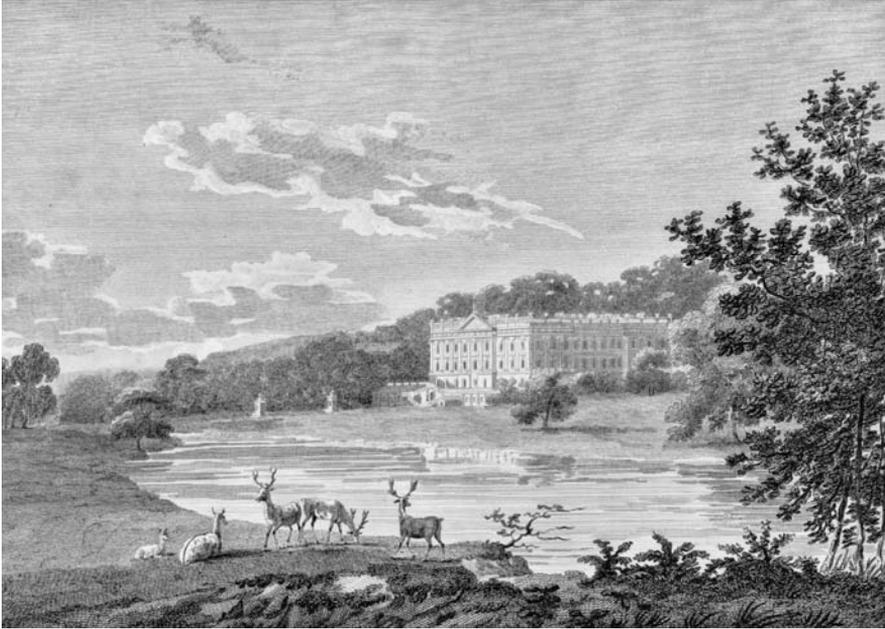


Figure 4: *After Edward Dayes, View of Chatsworth (1794)*. © Trustees of the British Museum.

from the road, which led . . . to the stables” (*PP* 251). Later, Darcy takes the gardener’s place and continues the conversation on the topic of fishing. Sharing his interest in the sport, Darcy forges a bond with Elizabeth’s uncle just as Emma Smith’s uncle befriended her future husband amid the baying of The Vyne Hunt’s foxhounds.

Elizabeth’s tour terminates at Pemberley; she and the Gardiners hastily retreat home after Jane’s letters catch up with them. The letters Emma Austen received contained only good news—that her children were well—so the Austens continued their tour to its end. They lingered in Derby but rushed through Loughborough, Leicester, and “Market Harborrough to Northampton & Ashby”—this last the estate of Emma’s cousin, the Marquess of Northampton, where they stayed overnight. They left Ashby “after luncheon” and arrived home in Hertfordshire around seven that evening: “Found the children well except Baby who was not quite well” (Austen-Leigh).

Delving into aspects of a Derbyshire tour in the first third of the nineteenth century underscores just how much Austen’s early readers were a part of her world, and how that world has changed during two ensuing centuries.

Whether like the Smiths, who wanted to explore their own country, or the Gardiners, who perhaps could afford only travel in England, those “bent upon fulfilling to the utmost [their] duties as tourists” (Simond 106) followed the fashion by exploring Derbyshire’s Peak District. Jane Austen’s narrator can exclude the discussion of modes of travel, the vagaries and highlights of this northern circuit, and the tour’s worldly framework because most readers could visualize themselves in the carriage beside Elizabeth. What happens when the party *arrives* is what Jane Austen focuses upon, and her approach deepens the complexity of her novel. How powerful that journey becomes once we see Derbyshire and recognize that Elizabeth Bennet’s life-change takes place not at home, not even among friends and new acquaintances at Hunsford, but on the road. Surveying that road, as it existed then, brings us that bit closer to understanding not only those early readers but also Jane Austen and her dearest creation, Elizabeth Bennet.

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