

Dark Side of the Moon: Jane Austen's World from a new perspective



**A study morning
led by
Dr Richard Moore
Friday 1 November 2019
from 10-12 noon
William Elder Building,
56-58, Castlegate,
Berwick,
TD15 1JT**

Jane Austen is often regarded as a rural miss living in a secluded part of Hampshire and knowing little of the wider world. She herself said that her work was like etching on a piece of ivory six inches wide. Yet one of her relations by marriage was guillotined in the French Revolution, throughout her life Britain was mainly at war, and her flirtation with the Irishman Tom Lefroy - who later became a noted lawyer and astronomer - created a considerable family drama. Jane also attended the theatre in London and was avid for the gossip about the stars, some of whom she actually incorporated in her early works.

Jane's early work is in fact full of boisterous cruelty presented with surreal verve. It has something of the zest of the clever, naughty child found later in W.S. Gilbert's *Bab Ballads*. In addition, her own lifetime included events such as the Robert Emmet rebellion, the scandalous and sometimes incestuous behaviour of the Lord Byron set, agonies of hand-wringing about the slave-trade, and continual scandal involving the Prince Regent and his coterie of dandies and hell-raisers.

This was a world in which Beau Brummel could spend four hours getting dressed while riots over poverty and deprivation rocketed. It was a world in which a lady of fashion could be nicknamed Billingsgate because she swore as much as the Billingsgate fish-porters. It was a world in which the Prince Regent's scandalous – if entertaining – wife could raise havoc while he himself staged (false) suicide attempts and once threatened to kill himself in a letter forty-two pages long.

In this session we shall examine Jane's life and times, covering everything from social scandals to health issues to the 1812 assassination of the Prime Minister. Thereby we shall inspect the dark side of Jane Austen's world which – despite its horrors - she so wittily and perceptively enjoyed.

Tickets £6, including refreshments. All are welcome and no previous knowledge is assumed.

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(*Dark Side of the Moon*)

