

JANE AUSTEN:
A FAMILY RECORD

SECOND EDITION

DEIRDRE LE FAYE



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa
<http://www.cambridge.org>

© Deirdre Le Faye 1989; 2004

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published by The British Library 1989
Second edition published by Cambridge University Press, 2004

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Adobe Garamond 11/12.5 pt. *System* L^AT_EX 2_ε [TB]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Le Faye, Deirdre.

Jane Austen: a family record / by Deirdre Le Faye.

p. cm.

Rev. ed. of: Jane Austen: a family record / by William Austen-Leigh and Richard Arthur
Austen-Leigh; revised and enlarged by Deirdre Le Faye, 1989.

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.

ISBN 0 521 82691 8 – ISBN 0 521 53417 8 (pbk.)

I. Austen, Jane, 1775-1817. 2. Austen, Jane, 1775-1817 – Family. 3. Novelists, English – 19th
century – Family relationships. I. Austen-Leigh, William. Jane Austen, a family record. II. Title.

PR4036.L433 2004

823'.7-dc21 2003053232

ISBN 0 521 82691 8 hardback

ISBN 0 521 53417 8 paperback

Contents

<i>List of plates</i>	page vii
<i>Foreword by Joan Impey</i>	ix
<i>Preface</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xiv
<i>Notes and abbreviations</i>	xvi
<i>Chronology of Jane Austen's life</i>	xviii
1 Austens and Leighs, 1600–1764	I
2 Deane and Steventon, 1764–75	13
3 India and France, 1752–85	29
4 Childhood at Steventon, 1775–86	41
5 Family life, 1786–92	53
6 First compositions, 1787–92	66
7 The young Jane, 1792–6	80
8 Later years at Steventon, 1796–9	95
9 The Leigh-Perrots and Bath, 1799–1801	118
10 Bath and the West Country, 1801–4	132
11 Bath and Southampton, 1804–8	145
12 Southampton and Chawton, 1808–9	164
13 First publication, 1809–12	180
14 <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> , 1813	194
15 <i>Mansfield Park</i> and <i>Emma</i> , 1814–15	209

16	<i>Emma and Persuasion, 1816–17</i>	230
17	Biography, 1817 and after	255
	<i>Notes</i>	286
	<i>Bibliography</i>	321
	<i>Family pedigrees</i>	345
	<i>Origin and descent of biographical information on Jane Austen</i>	356
	<i>Index</i>	359

Plates

- | | |
|---|--------------------|
| 1. ‘New Map of Hampshire’, by Charles Smith, <i>c.</i> 1801.
Courtesy of Hampshire County Council Museum Service
(ref. ACM 903.1/17). | <i>pages</i> 14–15 |
| 2. Front view of Steventon rectory; wood-engraving as used in
the <i>Memoir</i> of 1870. | 16 |
| 3. Rear view of Steventon Rectory; drawing, probably by
Anna Lefroy, 1814. | 16 |
| 4. Manuscript page from <i>Volume The Third</i> of the <i>Juvenilia</i> ,
1792.
Courtesy of the British Library, BL Add.MS.65381, f.16v. | 67 |
| 5. and 6. Revd and Mrs George Austen; silhouettes, <i>c.</i> 1800?
Private family collection. | 82 |
| 7. James (1765–1819), miniature <i>c.</i> 1790?
Courtesy of Jane Austen Memorial Trust. | 82 |
| 8. Edward (1767–1852), portrait, <i>c.</i> 1788
Courtesy of Richard Knight, esq. | 82 |
| 9. Henry (1771–1850), miniature <i>c.</i> 1820?
Private family collection. | 82 |
| 10. Cassandra (1773–1845), silhouette, n.d.
Private family collection. | 82 |
| 11. Francis (1774–1865), miniature, 1796
Private family collection. | 82 |
| 12. Charles (1779–1852), portrait, <i>c.</i> 1809.
Private family collection. | 82 |
| 13. Jane Austen (1775–1817), watercolour by Cassandra, <i>c.</i> 1810?
Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London
(reg. no. 3630). | 83 |
| 14. Watercolour miniature made from the above, by James
Andrews of Maidenhead, <i>c.</i> 1869.
Private family collection. | 83 |

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 15. Steel-engraved version of Andrews's miniature, by Lizars, as used in the <i>Memoir</i> , 1870. | 83 |
| 16. Map of Kent, taken from <i>A Journey round the Coast of Kent</i> (L. Fussell, London, 1818). | 102–3 |
| 17. Godmersham Park, north front.
Reproduced by permission of English Heritage, NMR. | 109 |
| 18. Portrait miniature, attributed to Jeremiah Meyer, of Mrs Leigh-Perrot, ?1764.
Private family collection. | 119 |
| 19. Portrait miniature by John Smart of Mr Leigh-Perrot, 1764.
Private family collection. | 119 |
| 20. 'The City of Bath', from <i>A Guide to all the Watering and Sea Bathing Places</i> , c. 1820. | 133 |
| 21. Southampton – early nineteenth-century engraving of the medieval city walls as seen from the tidal inlet of Southampton Water. | 158 |
| 22. Chawton Great House, west front.
Courtesy of Richard Knight, esq. | 173 |
| 23. Chawton Cottage (Jane Austen's House Museum). | 174 |
| 24. Manuscript page from the first version of <i>Persuasion</i> , 18 July 1816.
Courtesy of the British Library, BL Egerton MS. 3038, f.14v. | 237 |
| 25. No. 8 College Street, Winchester. | 249 |
| 26. Jane Austen, watercolour back view by Cassandra Austen, 1804.
Courtesy of the great-grandsons of Admiral Francis Austen. | 281 |

CHAPTER I

Austens and Leighs, 1600–1764

Jane Austen's paternal ancestry can be traced back with reasonable certainty to a William Astyn who lived in Yalding, a village in the Weald of Kent, and who died in 1522. His descendants moved to the neighbouring parish of Horsmonden, and by the end of the sixteenth century John Austen I (1560–1620) had become a man of considerable means, owning property in Kent and Sussex and elsewhere, and with the right to bear a coat of arms.¹ It seems likely that he lived in the manor-house of Broadford, close to Horsmonden, and his wealth was probably derived from the trade of clothier – the middleman who provided the capital and raw wool for the manufacture of cloth, and then sold on the finished product to merchants for retailing. Hasted, the eighteenth-century Kentish historian, instanced the Austens, together with the Bathursts, Courthopes and others, as being some of the

antient families of these parts, now of large estate, and genteel rank in life, and some of them ennobled by titles, [who] are sprung from and owe their fortunes to ancestors who have used this great staple manufacture, now almost unknown here . . . They were usually called, from their dress, The Grey Coats of Kent, and were a body so numerous and united, that at county elections, whoever had their votes and interest was almost certain of being elected.²

At his death in 1620 John Austen I left a family of eight sons, and the fifth of these, Francis I (1600–88), who described himself in his Will as a clothier, acquired another nearby manor-house, that of Grovehurst, and eventually inherited Broadford as well. Francis's son John Austen III (c. 1629–1705) lived on at Grovehurst, also following the trade of clothier, and one of this John's daughters, Jane, married Stephen Stringer, of a neighbouring family at Goudhurst; she numbered among her descendants the Knights of Godmersham, a circumstance which exercised an important influence over the subsequent fortunes of the Austen family in Jane's generation. John III's son John IV (c. 1670–1704) took over Broadford upon his marriage to

Elizabeth Weller of Tonbridge. This younger John seems to have been a careless, easy-going man, who thought frugality unnecessary, as he would succeed to the estate on his father's death; but he died of tuberculosis in 1704, predeceasing his father by more than a year, and leaving seven young children as well as debts unsuspected by his wife.³

Elizabeth Weller, a woman happily cast in a different mould from her husband, was an ancestress of Jane Austen who deserves commemoration. Though receiving only grudging assistance from her miserly father-in-law before he too died suddenly in 1705, of an illness that 'seiz'd his brains', she proved herself to be thrifty, energetic, a careful mother and a prudent housewife, and managed both to pay off her husband's debts and to give her younger sons a decent education. Her eldest son, John Austen V (1696–1728), was sent to Pembroke College, Cambridge, by his grandfather's executors in accordance with the old man's wish, but only minimal provision had been made for his brothers and sister. Elizabeth Weller therefore let Broadford for the highest rent she could obtain and moved to Sevenoaks, where she took the post of housekeeper at the town's Grammar School, boarding the Master and some of the boys in return for free schooling for her own sons. By the time she died in 1721 her daughter Betty was safely married to a Tonbridge lawyer, George Hooper, and the boys were already making their way in the world – Francis II (1698–1791) had been apprenticed to an attorney, Thomas (1699–1772) to a haberdasher (though he later became an apothecary), William (1701–37) to a surgeon, and Stephen (1704–51) to a stationer; the remaining son Robert (1702–28) died of smallpox.⁴

John Austen V and his son John Austen VI (?1716–1807) lived at Broadford during the eighteenth century, but the breach in the family caused by the inequality of John III's Will was never mended, and the senior Broadford line made no attempt to help or keep in touch with the younger Austen branches. It was left to Francis II, the legally trained brother, to retrieve the family fortunes and become the benefactor of his generation. After finishing his apprenticeship, he set up in Sevenoaks 'with £800 & a bundle of pens, as Attorney, & contrived to amass a very large fortune, living most hospitably, and yet buying up all the valuable land round the Town'. He remained single until he was nearly fifty, but then married two wealthy wives – first, in 1747, Anne Motley, who died in childbirth the same year, leaving a son, Francis Motley Austen – and second, in 1758, Jane Chadwick, the widow of Samuel Lennard of West Wickham, who had left her his estate. 'The widow was legally attacked by the nearest male relations of the defunct – she flung her cause into the hands of my Great Uncle, old Frank Austen; he won the cause & the wealthy widow's heart and hand.' Francis was also

careful to ask the rich Lady Falkland to be godmother to his eldest son, and in due course Francis Motley received from her a legacy of lands worth about £100,000. He then 'completed his Father's various purchases of land about Sevenoaks by buying Kippington House & demesne a short mile from the Town – and so forming an extensive Park'.⁵

In the meantime, Francis's younger brother Thomas, now an apothecary at Tonbridge, had had a son, Henry (1726–1807), who graduated at Cambridge and took Holy Orders. As the advowson of West Wickham was part of the Lennard estate, Francis was able to present his nephew Henry to this living, where he remained as rector from 1761 until 1780.⁶

The next brother, William the surgeon, also resident in Tonbridge, was Jane Austen's grandfather. In 1727 he married Rebecca, daughter of Sir George Hampson, Bt, a physician of Gloucester, and widow of another physician, William Walter.⁷ By her first husband Rebecca had a son, William Hampson Walter (1721–98), and by William Austen she had four children – Hampson (a daughter) (1728–30), Philadelphia (1730–92), George (1731–1805) and Leonora (1732–83). Rebecca died soon after the birth of Leonora. In 1735 William Austen made his Will, by which he left his property in trust to his brothers Francis and Stephen for them to use as they saw fit upon the education of his three children.⁸ The following year he married again, his second wife being Susanna Kelk of Tonbridge, thirteen years his senior,⁹ but unfortunately – perhaps with a touch of his father's carelessness – he did not bother to alter his Will to take account of this second marriage. When he died eighteen months later, Susanna Kelk was therefore under no legal obligation to care for her stepchildren and apparently felt no moral obligation either. She lived on for another thirty-one years, occupying William's house in Tonbridge,¹⁰ but played no part at all in rearing her husband's children; nor, in turn, did she mention them in her Will.¹¹

At the time of William's death in 1737 Francis was still a bachelor, but the next brother, Stephen, was married with one little boy and in business as a bookseller and publisher at the sign of the 'Angel and Bible' in St Paul's Churchyard, London. It must therefore have seemed most appropriate that he should be the one to give a home to the three little orphans. However, Stephen resented the charge, and treated the children 'with neglect, if not with positive unkindness'¹² – his 'idea of education developed itself strongly in a determination to thwart the natural tastes of the young people as much as possible'.¹³ George was sent to live with his Austen aunt Betty Hooper and her family¹⁴ while he attended Tonbridge School from 1741 to 1747.¹⁵ Philadelphia may also have been sent back to Kent, though at some stage

she did receive help and kindness from the Freeman family, cousins on the Hampson side, who lived in Hertfordshire;¹⁶ and in 1745, on her fifteenth birthday, was apprenticed to a London milliner.¹⁷ Leonora was the only one of the three children whom Stephen Austen was prepared to take into his household; she may perhaps have grown up handicapped in some way, for she never married and in later years lodged with various booksellers' families in London, supported financially by her brother and sister.¹⁸

Luckily, George was 'blessed with a bright & hopeful disposition which characterised him during the whole course of his life',¹⁹ and 'proved by his mildness and gentleness of temper, and his steadiness of principle'²⁰ that he had not suffered from his Uncle Stephen's harshness. 'The knowledge too of his almost destitute circumstances joined to energy of character, and very superior abilities, might naturally lead to success both at School and College.'²¹ In 1747, at the age of sixteen, he entered St John's College, Oxford,²² and received there the Fellowship which had been reserved by the Founder of the College for a scholar from Tonbridge School. In 1751 he obtained his Bachelor of Arts degree, and two years later was awarded a Smythe Exhibition – again thanks to his Tonbridge School background²³ – which enabled him to remain at Oxford for a further seven years to study divinity with a view to eventual ordination. In 1754 he became Master of Arts, and in March of that year was ordained deacon in Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford. Soon after this he moved back to Kent, was priested at Rochester in May 1755, and for the next three years combined the duties of perpetual curate of Shipbourne, near Tonbridge, with those of Usher (Second Master) at his old school.²⁴ His appointment to the living of Shipbourne was probably due to his uncle Francis's influence in the locality.²⁵ When he went back to St John's in 1758 he became assistant chaplain of the College, and was also Junior Proctor for the academic year 1759–60. During this term of office he was nicknamed 'The Handsome Proctor' on account of his commanding height and outstanding good looks. 'His eyes, [were] not large, but of a peculiarly bright hazel . . . The complexion was clear, the countenance animated, & the whole appearance striking.'²⁶ In 1760 he gained his Bachelor of Divinity degree, and his future now seemed reasonably assured. If he wished to marry he would need to find a clerical living rich enough to enable him to support a wife and family, but if he were prepared to remain celibate he could stay a Fellow of St John's for the rest of his life.

However, while George was still single and relatively poor he could not offer a home to his sister Philadelphia, and when she finished her apprenticeship in 1750 her only alternative to becoming a drudging seamstress or

penniless dependant like the unfortunate Leonora was to get married at the earliest opportunity. But by the standards of the time her lack of any dowry to bring to a marriage settlement would considerably reduce, if not entirely destroy, her chances of finding an eligible husband. As she had now come into possession of her share of what little was left of her father's estate, she petitioned the Court of East India Directors in November 1751 for leave to sail out by the *Bombay Castle* to friends at Fort St David, her sureties being James Adams of London and John Lardner of Southwark. The 'friends' may have been merely a form of words, for there can be little doubt that being without means or prospects she was going to India with the object of finding a husband amongst the European community there.

The *Bombay Castle* sailed from England on 18 January 1752, and reached Madras on 4 August of that year. Six months later, on 22 February 1753, Philadelphia married Tysoe Saul Hancock (1723–75), the surgeon at the East India Company's post at Fort St David.²⁷ Not much is known about Hancock's background – his family came from Sittingbourne in Kent, and he had a brother, Colbron, in business at Charing Cross, London, and a sister, Olivia, living in Margate.²⁸ He had been in India since at least 1748, when his name appears in the list of surgeon's mates serving out there with the East India Company.²⁹ As Francis Austen had for some years acted as his English agent or attorney it would seem quite possible that the match had been suggested to Philadelphia by her uncle, if not indeed pre-arranged by him direct with Hancock. The Hancocks stayed at Fort St David till 1759, and then moved to Fort William, Calcutta, where their only child, Elizabeth (known as Betsy in her childhood and as Eliza thereafter), was born in 1761.³⁰ It is thanks to Eliza's correspondence with her half-cousin Philadelphia, daughter of William Hampson Walter, that we get glimpses of the Austen family's life in the 1780s and 1790s.

The fourth member of William Austen's family, his stepson William Hampson Walter, is a shadowy but still quite significant figure in Austenian biography. There is no mention of him in his stepfather's Will, presumably because he was already adequately provided for out of his own father's estate.³¹ He may have been employed as a steward or agent for some local landowner;³² but in any event he passed all his life in the Tonbridge area and reared a family in reasonable comfort. He was on affectionate terms with George and Philadelphia and their families, as none of them made any distinction of the fact that they were related only by half-blood. A number of letters survive from the Austens to the Walters, written in the 1770s and 1780s, one of which gives news of the birth of Jane in 1775. William Hampson Walter, being some ten years older than his Austen

brother and sisters, was the first to settle in life, marrying Susanna Weaver in the mid-1740s and having six children by her. Their youngest son, James (c. 1760–1845), who was George Austen's godson,³³ entered the church, married a cousin from London, Frances Maria Walter, and in turn settled down to rear a large family in Lincolnshire, where he was for many years rector of Market Rasen and Headmaster of Brigg Grammar School.³⁴ His sister Philadelphia (1763–1834), known usually as 'Phylly' or 'Phillida', lived alone with her parents in Kent until she eventually married very late in life.³⁵ She kept up a regular correspondence with James, and one of her letters provides an early mention of Jane Austen as a child.³⁶ Of James's numerous family, one son, Henry, remained in touch with his distant Austen cousins, and is mentioned in Jane's letters many years later.³⁷

The other four children of William Hampson Walter have no direct bearing on Austenian biography, except in so far as their names are occasionally mentioned in family correspondence or memoirs; they were Sarah, who died in 1770 when on the verge of marriage;³⁸ Weaver, who also entered the church and eventually became the incumbent of Brisley in Norfolk, where he died in 1814;³⁹ and William and George, who both went to the West Indies, where the Hampson family had business interests, and died out there in 1787 and 1779 respectively.⁴⁰

It was now George Austen's wish to marry, and as a necessary first step he turned to his richer relations to help him find a suitable clerical living. George's second cousin Jane Monk (granddaughter of Jane (née Austen) Stringer of Goudhurst) had married Thomas Knight of Godmersham in Kent. Thomas Knight had actually been born Thomas Brodnax, but had changed his name to May upon inheriting one family estate and changed it again to Knight by the Will of another distant cousin, Mrs Elizabeth Knight, in order to inherit her estates at Chawton and Steventon in Hampshire.⁴¹ In the eighteenth century to change one's name required a private Act of Parliament, and Mr Knight's rapid alterations provoked one MP to remark: 'This gentleman gives us so much trouble, that the best way would be to pass an Act for him to use whatever name he pleases.'⁴² Mr Knight was perfectly ready to help his wife's Austen cousins, and had already presented one of them, the Revd Thomas Bathurst, to the curacy of Steventon in 1754. He presented Henry Austen to the rectory of Steventon in 1759, and when Henry resigned Steventon in favour of Francis Austen's gift of West Wickham in 1761, Mr Knight passed on the Hampshire living to Henry's cousin George Austen.⁴³ It was a time of laxity in the church, and George, although he afterwards became an excellent parish priest, does not seem to have resided or done duty at Steventon before 1764, evidently content to

leave the care of the parish in the hands of his cousin, Thomas Bathurst. George also turned to his kind uncle Francis Austen for assistance, and he purchased the two livings adjacent to Steventon, Ashe and Deane, so that George could have in the future whichever fell vacant first.⁴⁴

Some time in the early 1760s George Austen met and became engaged to Cassandra, younger daughter of the Revd Thomas Leigh, the rector of Harpsden (then usually called 'Harden'), a small village near Henley-on-Thames in Oxfordshire. The Leighs were part of the large clan of the Leighs of Adlestrop in Gloucestershire, of which family the Leighs of Stoneleigh Abbey in Warwickshire were a younger branch. Both the branches descended from Sir Thomas Leigh, Lord Mayor of London, behind whom Queen Elizabeth I rode to be proclaimed at Paul's Cross in 1558. He was rich enough and great enough to endow more than one son with estates; but while the elder line at Adlestrop remained plain country squires, the younger at Stoneleigh rose to a peerage at the time of the Civil War. 'When Charles I was on his march to Nottingham there to set up the Royal Standard, he found on reaching Coventry that the gates of that city were closed against him by order of the Mayor. On this he rode off to Stoneleigh Abbey where he and his escort were hospitably received by the reigning Sir Thomas Leigh⁴⁵ and for which act of loyalty Sir Thomas was created Baron Leigh of Stoneleigh in July 1643.

In the eighteenth century the Stoneleigh branch was approaching extinction, but the Adlestrop family flourished and was connected with many other wealthy families in Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire. A Leigh family history has much to say of one of the Adlestrop squires, Theophilus (c. 1643–1725), Jane Austen's great-grandfather.⁴⁶ He married Mary Brydges, sister of the first Duke of Chandos, and in honour of the Duke's wife, the 'excellent Cassandra',⁴⁷ gave this unusual Christian name to one of his daughters. For generations afterwards the name of Cassandra appeared in the Leigh family, and through them passed on to the Austens and their descendants. Theophilus was a strong character, the father of twelve children, and one who lived up to fixed, if rather narrow, ideas of duty. The family manuscript tells of his old-fashioned dress and very formal behaviour, of his affability to his neighbours and his strict but just government of his sons. His brother-in-law, the Duke of Chandos (Handel's patron), sent for Theophilus's daughters one by one to be educated in the splendour of the ducal estate at Canons, near Edgware, Middlesex, after which he arranged their marriages and provided them with dowries of £3,000 apiece.

Theophilus's third son, another Theophilus (1693–1785) – small, thin, clever and in his youth suffering from a pimply face⁴⁸ – was elected Master

of Balliol College, Oxford, in 1727 and occupied this position until his death. He was renowned beyond the bounds of Oxford University for his witty and agreeable conversation and for the sense of humour which he retained up to his dying day.⁴⁹ The Master's younger brother was the Revd Thomas Leigh (1696–1764), elected Fellow of All Souls at so early an age that he was ever after called 'Chick' Leigh. He became rector of the All Souls college living of Harpsden in 1731⁵⁰ and remained rector till his death in 1764, living entirely on his benefice and greatly beloved in his neighbourhood as an exemplary parish priest. 'He was one of the most contented, quiet, sweet-tempered, generous, cheerful men I ever knew and his wife was his counterpart.'⁵¹ Thomas Leigh married Jane Walker from Oxford, who was descended on her mother's side from the Perrot family, long settled in Oxfordshire but also known in Pembrokeshire at least as early as the fourteenth century. At Harpsden they had six children, of whom two died young, leaving James (1735–1817), Jane (1736–83), Cassandra (1739–1827), who became Jane Austen's mother, and Thomas (1747–1821). Thomas unfortunately was 'imbecile from birth', and according to the custom of the time was boarded out from the family but remained under their supervision until his death.⁵²

The three young Leighs grew up in the rural but elegant rectory at Harpsden, a spacious red brick house of late seventeenth-century date.⁵³ They knew all the gentry families in the Henley area – for example the Vanderstegens at Cane End; the London goldsmith and banker Gislingham Cooper with his children Edward and Ann at their country home of Phyllis Court;⁵⁴ the Newells of Henley Park and their witty daughter Mary; the Lybbe-Powys family at Hardwick Hall with their tall, handsome sons Phil, Tom and Richard; and the widowed Mrs Girle, retired from London to Caversham with her short, plump, jolly daughter Caroline.⁵⁵ Mary Newell and Caroline Girle were the particular friends of Cassandra Leigh, friendships that endured to their lives' ends, and there is also a hint that Tom Lybbe-Powys was one of Cassandra's admirers.

Mrs Leigh's aunt, old Miss Anne Perrot, was one of the family circle at Harpsden Rectory, and taught her great-nieces to read and to do fine needlework, which latter skill Cassandra in turn passed on to her own daughters.⁵⁶ Miss Anne Perrot was also most unselfishly responsible for increasing the Leigh family fortunes; when her childless brother Thomas Perrot announced his intention of bequeathing to her his estate at Northleigh in Oxfordshire, she begged him to leave the bulk of his property to their great-nephew James Leigh, and to leave her instead only an annuity

of £100. Her brother complied with this request, on condition that he took the surname and arms of Perrot. Accordingly, on the death of Mr Thomas Perrot in 1751, James, then in his teens, became Leigh-Perrot, and had the comfortable knowledge that in a few years' time he would enter into possession of the Northleigh house and lands. His sisters Jane and Cassandra also profited by the kindness of their great-aunt, who left £200 to each of them.⁵⁷

Another legacy which filtered from the Perrots through the Walkers and so on to the Austens was the advantage of being 'kin' to Sir Thomas White, the Founder of St John's College, Oxford, an advantage of which several members of the Austen family later availed themselves.⁵⁸

James Leigh-Perrot moved to Northleigh when he came of age, and while living there in 1762 had the pleasure of being one of the parties to the marriage settlement between his childhood friends Caroline Girle and Philip Lybbe-Powys.⁵⁹ However, Northleigh did not suit him, and a couple of years later he sold the estate to the Duke of Marlborough, buying instead for himself the small Berkshire property of Scarlets at Hare Hatch in the parish of Wargrave, situated on the Bath Road midway between Maidenhead and Reading. Scarlets had at one time been in the possession of James's mother, Mrs Leigh, and its ownership could be traced back through the Perrots and their maternal ancestors to the middle of the thirteenth century.⁶⁰ In October 1764 James married Jane Cholmeley (1744–1836), from an old Lincolnshire family and heiress to her late father's estate in Barbados.⁶¹ Miniatures of James and Jane, painted presumably at the time of their engagement, show him as a gentle, quietly handsome man, while she is an enchantingly pretty but determined-looking young girl.⁶² In early 1765 James completed the purchase of Scarlets, enlarged and improved the house,⁶³ and there he and Jane lived prosperously for the rest of their lives, amassing fine furniture and ceramics,⁶⁴ dining with thirty families in the neighbourhood⁶⁵ and, though childless, remaining a deeply devoted pair. It is this couple who are always referred to by Jane Austen in her letters as 'my Uncle' and 'my Aunt'.

Jane, the elder of the two Leigh daughters, did not marry until December 1768, when she was thirty-two.⁶⁶ She then became the wife of the Revd Dr Edward Cooper, the son of their Henley neighbour Mr Gislingham Cooper of Phyllis Court, and now a Fellow of All Souls: 'a rosy, round-faced divine, with a most amiable expression'.⁶⁷ Dr Cooper's father had just died, so his widowed mother sold Phyllis Court and moved to Southcote, a hamlet near Reading, where she rented a house – probably the old Southcote Manor

House⁶⁸ – from the Blagrave family.⁶⁹ Dr Cooper was of course obliged to resign his Fellowship upon marriage, so he and his wife joined his mother at Southcote for a few years till she died in 1771, when they moved to Bath. There are references to one or two visits made by the Austens to the Coopers during this Southcote period.

As for Cassandra Leigh, even at the age of six she had already achieved recognition for her cleverness. In 1745, when her witty uncle the Master of Balliol was visiting her parents, he wrote home praising his niece Cassandra for having delighted him by playing the lead in an extemporary nursery charade. At the same time Dr Leigh added that Cassandra was already ‘the Poet of the Family’ and had entertained him with several ‘Smart pieces promising a great Genius’.⁷⁰ In later years Cassandra’s granddaughter Anna Lefroy wrote:

The education of my Grandmother had not been, for a person in her station of life, much attended to; but whatever she had the opportunity of learning, there was quickness of apprehension, & a retentive memory to make the most of; and whilst her natural talent may well be supposed to have compensated in early life for many school room deficiencies, it certainly qualified her to be the companion of a Husband, who had little toleration for want of capacity in man or woman; and even, in an unpretending way, to assist in his labours of tuition. In regard to personal appearance, it was rather difficult to believe [her] own assertion that she never had been handsome; and I always attributed the low estimate she had of her own good looks to the circumstance of her Sister being a regular and acknowledged Beauty – The eyes, gray, & of rather a peculiar tint, were handsome, as also was the nose; the general contours of the face what might fairly be described as aristocratic; yet the face itself was too thin, especially about the mouth, and there could have been, habitually, no brilliancy of complexion. The hair was dark, & to a very late period of life retained its colour – The figure, rather falling below than exceeding the middle height, spare and thin.⁷¹

She was amusingly particular about people’s noses, having a very aristocratic one herself, which she had the pleasure of transmitting to a great many of her children. She was a quickwitted woman with plenty of sparkle and spirit in her talk who could write an excellent letter either in prose or verse, the latter making no pretence to poetry, but being simply playful common sense in rhyme.⁷²

Towards the end of his life the Revd Thomas Leigh moved to Bath for his health’s sake, died there in January 1764 and was buried in St Swithin’s church in Walcot parish.⁷³ The earliest surviving letter from his daughter Cassandra was sent from Princes Street, Bath, on 12 June 1762, to her old friend Tom Lybbe-Powys of Hardwick Hall, who had taken Holy Orders and had just heard that he was to be presented to the living of Fawley. ‘We feel the care with which it was composed . . . Had there been any love

passages between them, unsuccessful on his side? If so, it would account for the young lady writing and not her mother, on whom the duty would have more naturally devolved.⁷⁴

Permit me, dear Mr Tom Powys, to appear in the list of your congratulating friends, for not one of them, I am certain, can feel more real joy on the occasion than myself; in any instance of your good fortune I shd. have rejoiced, but I am infinitely happy to know you Rector of Fawley, as I well remember to have heard you wish for that appellation at a time when there was little probability of our living to see the day. May every wish of your heart meet with the same success – may every blessing attend you, for no one more deserves to be blessed; &, (as the greatest felicity on earth) may you soon be happy in the possession of some Fair one, who must be one of the very best of her sex, or she will not merit the good fortune that awaits her. If her heart is as full of love & tenderness towards you, as mine is of esteem & friendship, you will have no cause to complain, but will find yr.self completely happy in that respect, as you are sincerely wished in every respect, by your very affectionate & infinitely obliged

Cassandra Leigh

My Father, Mother & Sister join me in congratulatory compts. to all at Hardwick.⁷⁵

It is not known when and how George Austen met Cassandra Leigh, but it would seem probable that it was at Oxford, through the good offices of either the Master of Balliol or Dr Cooper. In 1763 George had his miniature painted – his bright eyes looking very dark in contrast to his powdered wig with its four neat sausage curls over each ear – and Cassandra had herself painted wearing a blue gown; as in the case of the Leigh-Perrots, the young couple probably exchanged these miniatures upon their engagement.⁷⁶ Arrangements now had to be made for his move to Steventon in order to provide a home for his bride, which led to a problem – Steventon rectory was only a small, dilapidated seventeenth-century house,⁷⁷ ‘of the most miserable description’,⁷⁸ so the new young rector was obliged to look elsewhere for a residence. Luckily, the neighbouring rector of Deane, the Revd William Hillman, was a person of some private fortune and preferred to live in the large house of Ashe Park outside his own parish, so that Deane rectory was vacant.⁷⁹ This then was the Austens’ first married home, though it too was far from ideal – ‘a low damp place with small inconvenient rooms, and scarcely two on the same level’⁸⁰ – and for which George had to pay about £20 a year in rent to Mr Hillman.⁸¹ It stood in Deane Lane, with a thatched mud wall round its garden, close to Deane House and All Saints church.⁸² Damp it must certainly have been, for a note at the back of the Deane parish register records that:

From the 12th Day of July 1763 to the Fifth of Febr'y. 1764 There were seldom Two dry Days together in the seven Months and some times Twenty Days Rain together. The Waters rose at Dean Janry. 7th and there was no passing for Foot People until after Lady Day [25 March]; many Graves in the Church fell in and there was no getting to the Church but thro' Mr Harwoods Yard or Garden; a Large Stream ran from Shepherd's Pond by Hall Gate thro' the Common Field, the Parsonage Meadow and Garden; and the Wells in the Parish rose to their Tops, and Fish were taken between the Parsonage Yard & the Road leading from Overton, to Basingstoke.⁸³

George went to Hampshire in the spring of 1764 to prepare Deane parsonage for occupation, and in his last bachelor evenings there prepared also for his duties at Steventon by copying out in his firm, clear handwriting the chaotic old Steventon parish register into a new book, from 1738 onwards to the entry for 11 March 1764.⁸⁴ On 15 March the marriage settlement between the young couple was signed – Cassandra had some leasehold houses in Oxford and the prospective sum of £1,000 to which she would become entitled by her father's Will on the death of her mother, and George brought to the settlement some freehold lands in Tonbridge and a third share of other properties there, all expectant on the death of his stepmother, Susanna Kelk.⁸⁵ On 26 April 1764 they were married by special licence in Bath, at St Swithin's, Walcot, the service being taken by Cassandra's friend Tom Lybbe-Powys, with her brother and sister as witnesses.⁸⁶ The sensible Cassandra, beginning as she meant to continue, did not waste money on elaborate wedding finery but was married in her travelling dress – hardwearing red woollen fabric cut trimly in the style of a riding habit.⁸⁷ The newly married couple set off straight away for Hampshire, their only honeymoon being the night spent at Andover en route.