

Walk Awhile



Briefing Paper 18

Jane Austen and Godmersham Park

Introduction

Access can be gained to the grounds of Godmersham House park via a footpath found at TQ 520056. The footpath leads off to the right from the North Downs Way National Trail at a point about 300 metres before the NDW itself turns right and drops down from the eastern edge of Kings Wood to join Mountain Street.

Although Jane Austen lived for most of her life in Hampshire, both she and her sister often visited Canterbury and stayed with her brother Edward Austen at Godmersham Park. Edward inherited Godmersham from the son of Thomas Knight, who had the Georgian mansion built in 1732. Thomas Knight's son was childless and adopted Edward Austen as his heir. Edward changed his name from Austen to Knight to ensure inheritance of the estate. In 1791 Edward Knight married Elizabeth Bridges of Goodnestone and letters written by Jane Austen record staying at both Goodnestone and Godmersham.¹ Jane also wrote that she feared her sister Cassandra would move permanently to Godmersham Park and expressed the view that if she had to move she would not like Canterbury as well as Southampton.²

Following the death of Edward Knight's wife Jane Austen continued to visit Godmersham and keep house for her brother between the years 1794-1813.³ During the period when she visited Godmersham Park Austen wrote the first drafts of *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Northanger Abbey*.⁴

¹ Brown, Hutchinson and Irwin; *Written City, A Literary Guide to Canterbury* revised edition 1990 page 43.

² *Ibid.*