

Family History Series

Part I: An Introduction to Family History

By Sophie Jackson



Family Tree of Herzog Ludwig or Louis III of Wurttemberg. (Wikimedia Wuseligi)



Taking the census. (Wikimedia Aiko)



Several Generations in one photo, grandparents, mother, daughters. (Wikimedia Calliopejen)

Family history, or genealogy, has become incredibly popular over the last few years, largely due to the increase in digital access to records and the surge in television programmes focusing on the subject. Recently I was asked to go into a sixth form college and discuss research skills from the perspective of a historian. The experience reminded me how much I had learned over the last ten years delving into history and how many ‘tricks-of-the-trade’ I had been shown by my mother, a keen genealogist. Exploring our personal past brings history alive and enables us to connect with it in a new and relevant way.

Family history always begins with immediate family - parents, grandparents, great grandparents, and uncles, aunts, cousins, siblings, etc. Most people will be able to lay their hands on photographs and other material related to immediate family, even if it is just their own birth certificate and pictures of their grandparents. Once you get past first generations the search becomes tougher, but also more exciting. Dates are vital. Birth, marriage and death are the three key dates family historians are looking for, in fact www.freeBMD.org.uk specialises in that information. Placing our parents’ and grandparents’ key dates is usually straightforward enough; great grandparents may be harder as exact dates may have been forgotten.

The national census returns are one of the primary sources used for this information and are an amazing piece of cultural history that reveal a great deal about our ancestors. The first complete census in modern terms occurred in 1841. The government had implemented census taking as early as 1801 but since the information was merely for statistical purposes no names were recorded, making the records useless for family history. The 1841 census was the first to include names, but it is still a limited resource as it did not give exact ages or locations. By 1851 the census was becoming a much more comprehensive record, a snapshot of life in Britain at that moment, and this makes tracing ancestors so much simpler.

Many libraries and record offices subscribe to www.ancestry.co.uk which has large archives of digital records including full copies of every census between 1841 and 1911. They are easy to search by name and date and the website also offers links to related records for particular ancestors.

Beyond the last 200 years tracing ancestors becomes trickier and digital resources are no longer so useful. Record offices hold vast catalogues of paper material, including the baptism returns for many parish churches. If you know the area an ancestor was born in then trawling through baptism records can pinpoint a birth date, unless they were non-conformists and were not baptised. If you don’t know the area then the search becomes a bit like finding a needle in a haystack, not impossible, but challenging.

Most family historians reach back into the 1700s and late 1600s and then find themselves at a dead end. Simply put, most ordinary people left very little trace of themselves before then. Anyone who claims to have traced their family back to the medieval period has to be taken with a pinch of salt as this is virtually impossible and likely to be guesswork.

However, there is plenty of scope within the 300 years of records available to keep a keen family historian busy for a lifetime. Whether it is tracing old family documents and photographs, or learning more about the world an ancestor lived in there is no reason for research to end once traditional records have run out.

Two Hundredth Anniversary Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen

By Sophie Jackson

'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.' So opens one of the best known and most popular romance novels of the last two centuries. Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*, which focuses on marriage, class struggles and love has captivated audience's since it was first published 200 years ago in January 1813. It has been turned into countless TV and film adaptations and been the inspiration for more than one contemporary novel, something Jane could never have anticipated.

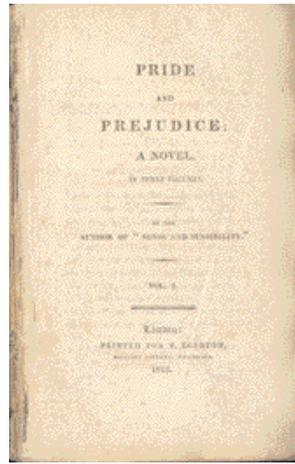
Jane was not yet twenty-one when she began one of the most insightful, wise and realistic novels of her age. She was staying with her brother Edward and his wife at Goodnestone Park, Kent and started her book two months before her birthday. The novel showed remarkable maturity and understanding for Jane's age, but she was greatly assisted by the wide-reading her father encouraged and a first failed romance earlier that year between herself and Tom Lefroy. Lefroy was sent away by his family when the entanglement with Jane was realised. Neither had any money and this no doubt inspired *Pride and Prejudice* and its emphasis on whether to marry for love or financial security.

Under the title *First Impressions*, Jane wove the story of the Bennet sisters, daughters of a man with a moderate income who feared destitution if they did not secure good marriages. But the Bennet sisters were far from mercenary, unlike their mother or Elizabeth Bennet's friend Charlotte Lucas. Jane continually reiterated the theme that marriage should be because of mutual affection, not for financial considerations. Elizabeth, the main protagonist of the story, comes across as a close model of Jane's personality, for her intelligence, determination and slight cynicism. She is a strong female character, undaunted by class and peer pressure and one of the reasons *Pride and Prejudice* has survived the test of time.

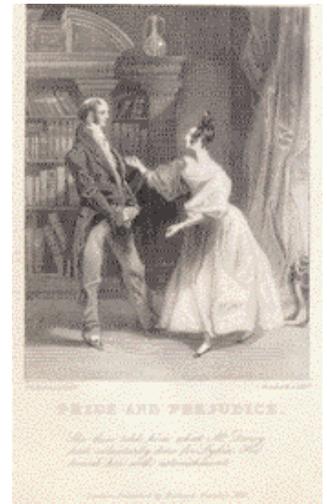
Jane revised *First Impressions* between 1811 and 1812 and changed its title. While it is not certain why she chose *Pride and Prejudice*, it may have been due to a similar phrase used in the novel *Cecilia* by Fanny Burney, a story Jane greatly admired. It is also remarked that the success of *Sense and Sensibility* with an alliterative title would have encouraged a name change in keeping with that first novel. The use of two alliterative terms would have helped readers identify the novel as being by the same author. Just as important was that a novel and a play had both recently been published under the title *First Impression* and it was advisable to have a different name to avoid confusion. Jane never foresaw the popularity of her work and made the error of selling the copyright of *Pride and Prejudice* for £110 to publisher Thomas Egerton. Though this meant he took all the risk publishing it, it also meant he took all the profits. It is thought Egerton made £450 from the sales of the first two editions of the books, not a penny of which Jane ever saw.

Pride and Prejudice was a triumph, while Charlotte Bronte criticised its cosiness, the poet W.H. Auden found it delightfully shocking and frank. Later critics have called *Pride and Prejudice* a novel of self-discovery, proving such journeys can be undertaken in genteel drawing-rooms as much as during dangerous adventures.

Jane enjoyed the triumph of her new novel for just four years before her life was swept away by a mysterious illness that may have been a resurgence of the childhood Typhus she suffered or TB or even cancer. Jane continued to write as her illness took hold, only giving up on her work in the last four months of her life. She died in July 1817, but though her life was short she left an amazing legacy for future readers and writers. Today *Pride and Prejudice* has sold 20 million copies worldwide and was voted second in the UK's *Best-Loved Book 2003*. Not bad for a lady who never left those same genteel drawing-rooms.



Title Page for the first edition of *Pride and Prejudice* 1813. (Wikimedia Awadewit)



Jane (should say Elizabeth) talks to Mr Bennet about Mr Darcy, an 1833 illustration. Costumes are portrayed as the time of the drawing rather than correct for *Pride and Prejudice*'s era. (Wikimedia Adam Cuerden)



Jane (should say Elizabeth) Meets Catherine de Burgh, an 1833 illustration from *Pride and Prejudice*. (Wikimedia Adam Cuerden)



Tom Lefroy as an old man, in his youth he fell in love with Jane Austen and their failed romance may have inspired *Pride and Prejudice*. (Wikimedia Magnus Manske)



Early 19thC lock of hair in a memoriam hair display, believed to be that of novelist Jane Austen, name of Jane Austen is written in hair within the piece. [Dominic Winter, South Cerney. Jun 08. HP: £4,800. ABP: £5,664.](#)



Pride and Prejudice, The Peacock Edition, Jane Austen, illustrated by Hugh Thomson, Macmillan, 1894, gilt embossed cloth and all edges gilt, near fine, with *Gulliver's Travels*, illustrated by C E Brock, Macmillan, 1894, minor wear. [Hartleys, Ilkley. Sep 10. HP: £450. ABP: £531.](#)



Jane Austen. Northanger Abbey and Persuasion, with biographical notice of the author: 4 volumes, 1st Edition, 1818, half-calf. [Gorringes, Lewes. Mar 02. HP: £1,700. ABP: £2,006.](#)



Pride and Prejudice. The Peacock Edition, Jane Austen, illustrated by Hugh Thomson, Macmillan, 1894, gilt embossed cloth and all edges gilt, slightly cocked, gilding dulled with wear to corners. [Hartleys, Ilkley. Sep 10. HP: £310. ABP: £365.](#)