

Steventon Rectory Images Provenance - © Deborah Charlton

There are differing images that purport to be of Steventon Rectory and the ultimate question was - what did Steventon Rectory look like? With this in mind, an investigation of the Steventon field to search for the location of the buried foundations of the Rectory was undertaken by means of archaeological non-intrusive survey in 2007 and intrusive excavation in 2011^{1&2}.

The results were published in 2017 in the book entitled *Archaeology Greets Jane Austen*¹. The book, which is fully illustrated, comprehensively describes the history of Steventon, the research undertaken, the discovered foundations of the Rectory and the many artefacts uncovered.

The archaeology informed the location, size and building materials. However, this raised as many, if not more, questions than answers when considering the images.

Front images have been used over the years in publications to represent the visual appearance of the Rectory, when looking at it from the main village lane. To the viewer they appear to show two different dwellings. Ongoing research has been providing some stimulating and surprising theories².

The six 'objects'^{1&2} under discussion in this article will be referred to as **manuscripts** by the colour of their covers which are Red (MS) and Black (MS). The **drawings** as Façade No 1 and Façade No 2 and the **prints** as Memoir engraving and Trellis with border.

Manuscripts

The **Red** manuscript is widely known and referred to past and present as the 'Lefroy' Manuscript. The owner was Admiral Sir Francis Austen³ and it remains with his direct descendants in their private collection². The paper watermark for the manuscript is 1854^{1&2}.

The **Black** manuscript resides with Jane Austen House Museum in Chawton^{1&2}. The original owner is unknown as the manuscript was purchased in 1955 from a bookseller by Miss Elizabeth Jenkins, a founder member of the Jane Austen Society (UK), who deposited it into the then Jane Austen Memorial Trust archives in 1975^{1&2}. The paper watermark for the manuscript is 1835^{1&2}.

Drawings

The **Façade No 1** drawing appears in the Red (MS)². It has been drawn directly on to the page and there is no annotation to the drawing; the drawing is unsigned and artist unknown². There is a faint pencil note written directly onto the page below the drawing; it reads:

"The ...but the drawing was made from description and is not perfectly correct. The door should have more glass and less wood work. The windows were casement. JCEL"²

The note's handwriting is unverified for this article².

The opposite page has hand written words pasted on to the full page. This is one page of several of Anna Lefroy's description of the Rectory that are also pasted on to subsequent pages of the manuscript; the handwriting is unverified for this article².

The provenance for this drawing in the Red (MS)² is still purported to be the one used for the print annotated 'Steventon Parsonage' in James Edward Austen Leigh's 1870 A Memoir of Jane Austen. This supposition has been derived from a few, present day known, letters between James Edward Austen Leigh and his half-sister Anna Lefroy¹. The correspondence from James Edward to Anna dated 8th July 1869 and from Anna to James Edward dated 20th July 1869 exchange memories of their home in Steventon and Anna refers to '...a little drawing of Julia's, made from my description of the parsonage: more pretty than true: yet something may be made of it...' ^{2&4}

The image of Façade No 1, drawing in the Red (MS)², can be found on page 127 'A Portrait of Jane Austen: Published 1978' by David Cecil annotated as 'Chawton Cottage: Drawing by Anna Lefroy'^{2&5}. Chawton Cottage was the home of Jane Austen but was not her birthplace and first home at 'Steventon Parsonage'.

The **Façade No 2** drawing appears in the Black (MS)^{1&2}. It has been drawn directly on to the page and the words written on the page (bottom right) are 'Rectory house now pulled down'. The opposite page has the words of James Austen poem 'Home' written directly on to the page; the handwriting is unverified for this article; the drawing is unsigned and artist unknown².

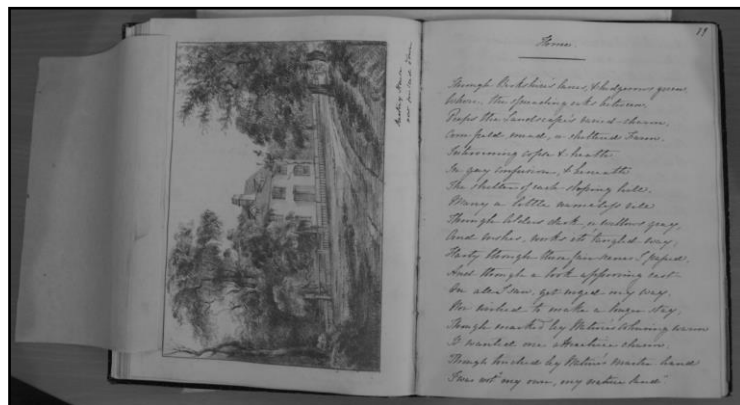


Fig 1: Façade No 2: 'Rectory House now pulled down' and poem 'Home'

The drawing was done with a graphite pencil and it sparkles due to the mineral content.

Prints

The **Memoir engraving** and the annotation of 'Steventon Parsonage' was the first image of the birthplace and first home of Jane Austen presented to the wider public, in 'A Memoir of Jane Austen' 1870 by James Edward Austen Leigh. It was printed by Spottiswoode & Co² and published by Richard Bentley¹, Publisher & Printer, of New Burlington Street. The Spottiswoode and Austen Leigh families were Partners in the ownership of the Spottiswoode Company from 1862 to 1900. The business then became a limited company, of which Edward Austen Leigh and Richard Austen Leigh were among the first directors¹.



Fig 2: Memoir engraving: ‘Steventon Parsonage’
A Memoir of Jane Austen by J. E Austen Leigh 1870

The **Trellis with border** is a framed print which is in the possession of Jane Austen House Museum in Chawton¹. It has been annotated ‘LEFROY STEVENTON 1820’ within the border trim². Its provenance is not clear but in 1954 the Jane Austen Society Report contained the notice that “Miss Helen Lefroy has lent permanently to the [Memorial] Trust an original drawing in pencil of the front elevation of Steventon Rectory by Anna Lefroy, the Rev. James Austen’s elder daughter. ...”^{1&2} It appears that the print was framed and hung on the wall in Jane Austen House Museum in Chawton for many years.



Fig 3: Trellis with border: ‘LEFROY STEVENTON 1820’

In 2005 a copy of ‘the smaller house’ [trellis with border²] was requested for inclusion in an article published in the Jane Austen Society of North America Online ‘Persuasions’⁵. Foot Note 2 of the article states that at the time of sending the image the following information was given:

“Tom Carpenter, Trustee, Jane Austen Memorial Trust, has also found it difficult to reconcile Lefroy’s two houses [trellis with border and memoir engraving²]. When he generously forwarded the image of the front of the small house with the latticed entryway, he labelled it the “side” of Steventon Rectory. He believes, he said in an email, that “it is in fact the (East facing) side view” and explained that when looking at the house in relation to the Glebe Map [1821²], “it is the only way I found to co-relate those images.”⁵

In 2008 the author of an article⁶ being prepared for publication in the Jane Austen Society's annual report asked for information about this 'image' [trellis with border²] and the following written information was given and included in full within the article:

"In microscopic writing near the bottom of the frame, Deirdre Le Faye discovered a signature and date. To quote from her email: Tom Carpenter took the picture down from the wall, and together we looked at it with a magnifying glass, and it reads: B. Lefroy Steventon 1820. So, there is no doubt as to the artist and date for this one, at least. So, the artist is not Anna, not JEAL but Ben Lefroy, Anna's husband..." "... The crude sketch of Rectory house now pulled down in the black manuscript is evidently a copy of Ben's 1820 drawing."⁶

The Trellis with border can be found on page 247 of 'Collected Reports of the Jane Austen Society 1966-1975'³ but it has been annotated 'Steventon Rectory, drawn by Anna Lefroy'². The image is part of a report entitled 'Anna Lefroy's Description of Steventon Rectory in the Rev. George Austen's time' which is a full copy of Anna Lefroy's description of '... The Rectory House at Steventon...' which are the words extracted from the opposite page to Façade No 1 in the Red (MS)².

Conclusion

Only the **Memoir engraving** is annotated with both the geographical place 'Steventon' and building type 'Parsonage' together².

Visually the **Memoir engraving** and the **Façade No 1** have only one main difference; that of the 'sweep'¹ to the house. **Façade No 1** has a circular one and the **Memoir engraving** has an elongated one which matches the elongated 'sweep' drawn on the 1821 Glebe Plan².



Fig 4: Façade No 1 (adapted by author)



Fig 5: Memoir engraving

The **Trellis with border** annotation matches the lettering of the Printer Spottiswoode 1870 publication. Richard Austen Leigh remained actively involved with the company until 1961 and consideration must be given to the print date being to middle of the 20th Century².



Fig 6: Memoir of Jane Austen (1870)

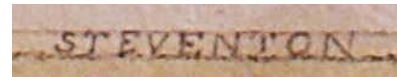


Fig 7: Trellis with border

There are minor differences between the **Trellis with border** and the **Façade No 2** with one main difference. The **Trellis with border** has a plant in a pot on the left-hand side of the trellis screening and the **Façade No 2** does not.



Fig 8: Trellis with border



Fig 9: Façade No 2

When looking in depth at the various use of these front images, and taking into consideration the sporadic nature of research discoveries over a period of time, consideration must be given that a wide variety of assumptions and narratives have been active when choosing which ‘image’ is accepted and included^{2&5}.

The archaeological interpretation of the physical material evidence set out in *Archaeology Greets Jane Austen* shows that the architectural style was not Georgian but that of a rural vernacular long rectangular ‘Farmhouse’ the origins of which are from an earlier time period. Therefore, the archaeological evidence establishes convincingly that the currently known front images are not true portrayals of the birthplace and first home of Jane Austen at Steventon.

Research by author is ongoing and new findings will be included in forthcoming publications.

Deborah Charlton

Notes

1 Deborah Charlton, *Archaeology Greets Jane Austen by unearthing her birthplace and first home* (2017)

2 Deborah Charlton, Steventon Rectory Project (SRP) Archive, Archaeo Briton

3 Collected Reports of the Jane Austen Society 1966-1975, Report for the year 1975 pp.245-248

4 Deirdre Le Faye, *A Chronology of Jane Austen and her Family* (2006) p.685

5 Linda Robinson Walker, *Why Was Jane Austen Sent away to School at Seven? An Empirical Look at a Vexing Question* (2005). Persuasion Online

6 Deirdre Le Faye, In: *Jane Austen Society Report* (2008). *Art and the Austen Family* pp.129-144; Adrienne Bradney-Smith

*All Figures from *Archaeology Greets Jane Austen*: Published 2017 by Deborah Charlton and/or Steventon Rectory Project Archive, Archaeo Briton

**Figure 4: Adapted by Author from *A Portrait of Jane Austen*: Published 1978’ by David Cecil pg 127

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