



Fanny Austen's diaries

A 12 year old in Worthing in 1805

Jane Austen's niece Fanny, the eldest of her brother Edward's eleven children, later became Fanny Knight. Edward Austen changed his surname on the death of his adoptive mother Catherine Knight in 1812, and Fanny had to follow suit. This change of name was initially unwelcome to her – she wrote in her diary: “How I hate it!!!!!!” In 1805, however, she was still an Austen.



Fanny Austen (1793-1882), painted by Jane Austen's sister Cassandra on 3 September 1805, a fortnight before the three of them travelled to Worthing with Fanny's parents and her governess

Fanny was one of Jane Austen's two favourite nieces. She kept a diary throughout her long life, and its early years are an invaluable source of information about Jane Austen – including about the stay in Worthing.

Sadly, however, Fanny and her parents were in Worthing only for the first six days of Jane Austen's stay. In addition, the entries in Fanny's diary are brief. They are, however, rather charming, and paint an evocative picture of what happened that week.

Fanny's first mention of Worthing comes in a letter of 15 September 1805 to her former governess, Miss Chapman: “Papa, Mama, Aunts C– and Jane, Miss Sharpe [Fanny's new governess] & myself set out on Tuesday for Worthing in Sussex, where Miss S will stay some time, for her eyes.”

She tells Miss Chapman that, if Miss Chapman writes to her while she is in Worthing, she should address her letter to “Mr Stanfords, Worthing, Shoreham, & your letter will arrive safe. I enjoy the thoughts of sea-bathing very much.”

Fanny's diary tells us that the party duly set off for Worthing on Tuesday 17 September. They reached Battle about four, but could not find any accommodation there, so went on to Horsebridge, where they stayed the night. On the Wednesday they spent two or three hours in Brighton, and arrived in Worthing at five o'clock. In the evening they walked on the sands.

On Thursday Fanny went with her grandmother, Mrs Austen, to buy fish on the beach, and then “had a most delicious dip” in the sea. They dined at four o'clock, and went to a raffle in the evening, at which “Aunt Jane” won seventeen shillings. On Friday morning Fanny and her mother waited on the sands for Cassandra to come out of “the warm bath”. (This would have been Wicks's Original Royal Baths on the seafront.) Then Fanny went for a walk with her mother, Jane, and some friends called the Johnsons. In the evening they walked again and, as on the previous day, went to the raffle.



Wicks's Baths (right) in the early 1820s. The new seafront promenade was completed in 1821. The building that appears to be just to the left of the baths – Montpelier Terrace, built around 1810 – was in fact some distance away

Saturday seems to have been a rather dull day. A friend called Miss Fielding dined with them, and they did not walk in the evening. Instead Fanny called on the Johnsons. Sunday was duller still, but in those days Sundays usually were. “Miss Lloyd, G-mama, & Aunt Jane, went to Church,” Fanny tells us, “& I wrote Henry [one of Fanny's younger brothers].”

On Monday 23 September, Fanny and her parents left Worthing and returned to Godmersham Park, the family home in Kent. Her governess Miss Sharpe remained in Sussex until 4 November.