



Local History: Street Names

Alton is typical in having street names that reflect royalty, locally important people and all manner of topics dreamt up by local bureaucrats who, in the past, lacking any imagination, resorted to the use of tree and bird names, amongst others, as road names for new housing developments. Nowadays Alton Town Council are keen to suggest road names that reflect some historical association or past connection, thus reverting to a practice adopted some sixty years ago when Stephen Warner, an honorary curator at the Curtis Museum, served on the local Council.

Luckily the area also has rich literary associations and the subject here is the source of the names used on the Greenfields estate which was built on land formerly part of Amery Farm to the North of the town. Ironically, Greenfields Avenue, the axis road of a development that began in 1960, seems to represent what the new houses were built on and thus destroyed.

Vyne Close originates from the name of a popular National Trust house to the north of Basingstoke, The Vyne – ancestral home of the Chute family.

Southview Rise seems to lack any modicum of original thought, although at least one is aware of the orientation of the road – well the section from the shops down to Greenfields Avenue at least!

Above the parade of four shops, one of which has been empty for some years now, are to be found road names that correspond to tree names – perhaps an original intention was to plant the relevant species on the verges. Here you can find Cherry Way, Oakdene, Walnut Close, Alder Close, Maple Close, Chestnut Close, Hawthorns, Lime Avenue and, perhaps because they were running out of tree names, Lime Grove. However, some tree-based road names exist elsewhere in the town, some named before, and some after this part of Greenfields was built.

By far the most interesting selection are the roads in the South West part of the housing area - those names associated with Jane Austen, although two other roads in a different part of the town have similar origins. One of eight children of the Rector of Steventon, a village to the west of Basingstoke, Jane Austen spent the first twenty five years of her life there, moving to Chawton in July 1807. She died in Winchester in July 1817 and is buried beneath the north aisle of the cathedral.

Jane Austen's House in Chawton houses an attractive collection of items connected with Jane and her family including the table that she used to write her novels. There is some of her jewellery, and examples of her needlework skill. In the drawing room is a fine Hepplewhite bureau-bookcase and chairs that belonged to Jane's father and came from the rectory at Steventon. The bookcase contains some first editions of Jane's novels.



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The pretty garden contains many varieties of plants and herbs common in the late 18th century and is still a peaceful spot, especially as it was by-passed in 1971. In the Old Bakehouse you will be able to see Jane's donkey carriage that she used when she was ill and too weak to travel far on foot.

Brandon Close – Colonel Brandon appears in *Sense and Sensibility* and was considered by many to be a dull, older man. Alan Rickman, playing him in the 1995 film did much to glamorise Colonel Brandon's image. He falls in love with romantic Marianne Dashwood (played by Kate Winslet), who also loves John Willoughby. However, Brandon and Dashwood eventually marry.

Willoughby Close – John Willoughby in *Sense and Sensibility* has been described as “*Delightfully handsome, charming, clever and refined, he is every girl's dream man*”. In reality he is a villain, but Jane Austen seems to have had a soft spot for a Regency rake!

Thorpe Gardens – Isabella and John Thorpe are minor characters in *Northanger Abbey*. It is Jane Austen's only 'gothic' novel and was published after her death. Decrepit castles, locked rooms, and mysterious chests all feature in the story.

Tilney Close – so named from the Tilney family in *Northanger Abbey* who seem to hide many secrets. Peter Firth as Henry Tilney in the 1986 production strikes a romantic figure, who is attracted to the innocence and openness of Catherine Moreland.

Northanger Close – *Northanger Abbey* (1818) is generally regarded as a gothic novel published after Jane Austen had established her reputation with works such as *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814) and *Emma* (1816). It is the one book which is explicitly literary in that it is primarily concerned with books and readers.

Wentworth Gardens – Captain Wentworth in *Persuasion* (1818) is a young sailor with poor family connections who has his engagement to Anne Elliot broken. After the Napoleonic wars, Captain Wentworth has gained both rank and money and chance throws the two of them together. A noted TV adaptation was filmed in Lyme Regis in 1996.

Netherfield Close – Netherfield Park is home to the Bingley family in *Pride and Prejudice* - one of the most popular of Jane Austen's novels. It follows the efforts of the Bennet family to marry their five daughters to suitable young men.

Bennet Close - The 2005 film adaptation, the sixth, of *Pride and Prejudice* brought Keira Knightly a Golden Globe award, playing Elizabeth Bennet. Dame Judi Dench played the pompous and overbearing Lady Catherine de Burgh. The Bennet family are, in turn, hysterical, serious, frivolous



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and simple-minded. Elizabeth Bennet was Jane Austen's favourite heroine and the book is considered one of her best.

Bingley Close – in *Pride and Prejudice* Mr Bingley moves into Netherfield Park, is a neighbour of the Bennet family and he is pursued by Mrs Bennet as a possible suitor for one of her daughters.

"A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!"

Jane Bennet married Mr Bingley.

Musgrove Gardens – The Musgrove family appear in *Persuasion*; Mary Elliot, played in the 1995 film by Sophie Thompson, marries into the Musgroves. The two Musgrove sisters display different temperaments – Henrietta is sunny and cheerful and says of her sister – *"Louisa is grown so severe, Mama, I wonder she shall want a ribbon in her hair at all. Give her a book of verse to hold instead"*.

Croft Close - In *Persuasion*, Admiral Croft and his wife rent the Elliot family estate from a financially troubled Sir Walter Elliot. Admiral Croft's brother in law is Captain Wentworth who loves but loses Anne Elliot. The 1995 film of *Persuasion* was shot on location in and around Lyme Regis in Dorset using only natural light and won six awards.

Kellynch Close – Kellynch Hall is the home of Sir Walter Elliot and the Elliot family, important characters in *Persuasion*. The themes used by Jane Austen of young men and women, their social positions and incomes are still evident. However, there is something quieter and more deeply felt, as two special people (Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth) are given a second chance of happiness.

Beavers Close is the odd one out.