**Jane Austen: Sevenoaks**

Visited in 1788 with parents and sister.

Austen’s first trip into Kent took place in 1788, at the age of 12, when she travelled with her parents and sister to visit the Red House in Sevenoaks, the stately town house of her great uncle Francis. A prosperous lawyer, Francis Austen was her father’s guardian and sometime benefactor: he financed George Austen’s education and purchased the living of Deane for him, making him rector of Steventon and Deane. Francis’s second wife, Jane (nee Chadwick) was one of Jane Austen’s godmothers.[[1]](#footnote-1) In July of 1788 her great uncle hosted a sumptuous dinner, which Austen and her family attended, and at which she met the wealthiest branch of her family.

Jane seems to have found the experience trying. She may have drawn inspiration from it for the dinner party that takes place at the Grants’ rectory in her third novel, \_*Mansfield Park\_* (1814),[[2]](#footnote-2) during which the timid protagonist, Fanny Price, attempts to avoid social interaction:

In the drawing-room Mr. Crawford certainly was, having been just long enough arrived to be ready for dinner; and the smiles and pleased looks of the three others standing round him, shewed how welcome was his sudden resolution of coming to them for a few days on leaving Bath. A very cordial meeting passed between him and Edmund; and with the exception of Fanny, the pleasure was general; and even to \_*her\_* there might be some advantage in his presence, since every addition to the party must rather forward her favourite indulgence of being suffered to sit silent and unattended to.

\_*Mansfield Park\_*

**Article by Susan Civale**

**Bibliography**

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Poplawski, Paul. *A Jane Austen Encyclopedia*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998.

1. Paul Poplawski, 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Marilyn Butler, ODNB. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)