

News from St. Nicholas' Church, Steventon

Olde Meade, Steventon, Hampshire

We send greetings to our many friends who are members of JASNA. In September Atherton Harrison, Charles Elderfield and I were invited by Mary Lou White to join her tour party for lunch at the Wheatsheaf. It gave me the greatest pleasure to tell our friends that

we were dining in the very room where the idea of JASNA was suggested. It was a very special luncheon that we enjoyed so much.

The year has passed quickly and we have welcomed a great number of visitors including many coach parties which Atherton, Charles and I have had the pleasure of meeting; we have shared some of the history of our church. We like to point out the quill pen placed on the steeple by the Victorians; the fireplace near the pulpit, with its chimney going to the roof through the massively thick flint and rubble church walls; the poignant epitaphs on the memorials in the chancel; and so many other special pieces of history that surround our church.

The cards which Atherton has so kindly designed for sale in aid of the church are very popular and available only here in Steventon.

It is a most interesting thought that members of the Austen family were rectors of St. Nicholas' Church, succeeding one another for more than a hundred years. Jane Austen's father George was rector from 1761 to 1801, his eldest son James was rector from 1801 to 1819, followed by Henry from 1819 to 1823, when Edward (Austen) Knight built a new rectory for his son William who was rector for 50 years, from 1823 to 1873. Such a wonderful span. We contemplate the many, many people, happy and sad, who have trodden the path to the church.

Our rector, Michael Kenning, is very interested in Jane Austen and the religious aspects of her novels. Through the year our congregations have increased. On special occasions we repeat one of the prayers that Jane Austen wrote during her twenty-five years growing up in Steventon. Our organist, Paul Wright, and his wife Marilyn, our choirmistress, bring added joy to the services. Often the flower ladies tell of meeting visitors and talking with them whilst arranging the flowers. The merry band of volunteers who mow and trim the churchyard have been encouraged to greater effort by our many "pilgrims." The lane to the church has been greatly improved by trimming the overhanging branches.

Finally, the bells—refurbished by JASNA member donations—what a joy it is to ring them before the Sunday service. We say thank you most sincerely to members of JASNA for their friendship and generous support.

Joyce Bown

