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## Main content

Article Preview :

WHILE RESEARCHING my 2005 AGM Plenary Session talk at the British Library, I stumbled upon Richard James Wheeler's book about James Stanier Clarke's portrait of Jane Austen. Waiting for my book delivery, I typed "Jane Austen" into the library's computer catalogue and after scrolling down 400+ titles, I encountered his book on the Clarke portrait. Throughout his life, Richard Wheeler indulged his main avocation: books. His love of books led him serendipitously to the bookstore where he found Clarke's *Friendship Book*. (1)

Admirers of Jane Austen are familiar with Cassandra Austen's small pencil and water-color sketch of her sister's face and its Victorian copies (Record, plate VIII, and accompanying illustrations between 128 and 129). Literary and art historians deem the Cassandra portrait, in the possession of London's National Portrait Gallery since 1948, as the only known authentic likeness of Jane Austen's face taken when she was an adult. But another portrait of the adult Jane Austen, also a sketch in pencil and watercolors and also small (6 inches by 4 inches), exists: the work of the Rev. James Stanier Clarke, Domestic Chaplain and Librarian to the Prince of Wales (later, George IV).

Clarke is known to Austenites for escorting the author through Carlton House, the Prince Regent's London residence, on Monday, 13 November 1815, when she went to see the Prince's Library, and then engaging her in an epistolary exchange in which he urged her "to delineate in some future Work the Habits of Life and Character and enthusiasm of a Clergyman--who should pass his time between the metropolis & the Country ... Fond of, & entirely engaged in Literature--no man's Enemy but his own" (16 November 1815). If he had also described himself as a fine sketch artist, he might have been regarded by Austen biographers with greater seriousness, rather than as the comical man who was loath to give up having Jane Austen feature him in a romantic novel.

Richard Wheeler's finding the Clarke portrait of Jane Austen is almost the stuff of a romantic novel--or at least the stuff of a novel about a lover of antique books. In 1955, a second-hand book dealer in Canterbury, Kent, found at the estate sale of a proverbial "little old lady" a small slip case containing an album bound in eighteenth-century green morocco leather decorated with gild. The gilded words *Sacred To Friendship* (hereafter called *Friendship Book*) appeared on the upper part of the spine; on the lower were the gilded initials "J.S.C." (Wheeler 6). Richard Wheeler came upon this book in the estate sale visitor's secondhand bookstore.

Within the covers, he found the paper watermarked, authenticating it as eighteenth-century paper. And on those pages, he discovered more than one hundred drawings, verses, and autographs by such celebrities as poet William Cowper, painter George Romney, novelists Charlotte Smith and Anna Seward, and actors Richard Brinsley Sheridan and John Kemble. Crayon and water-color sketches of two unnamed women appear in the book. The Tate Gallery assisted Wheeler in identifying one subject...

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