

Secrets of Jane Austen's Handwriting



Patricia Field

Graphologist Patricia Field tells all

When I was approached by the Jane Austen Centre with a request to analyse Jane's handwriting I had to confess my only knowledge of her was through reading *Pride and Prejudice* at school, many years ago. On reflection, I believe my ignorance of her work and personal history, prior to writing the report, allowed me to be objective in my findings. Since the initial request, and only after I had completed the analysis, have I read several of her novels and caught up with some of the film and television costume dramas.

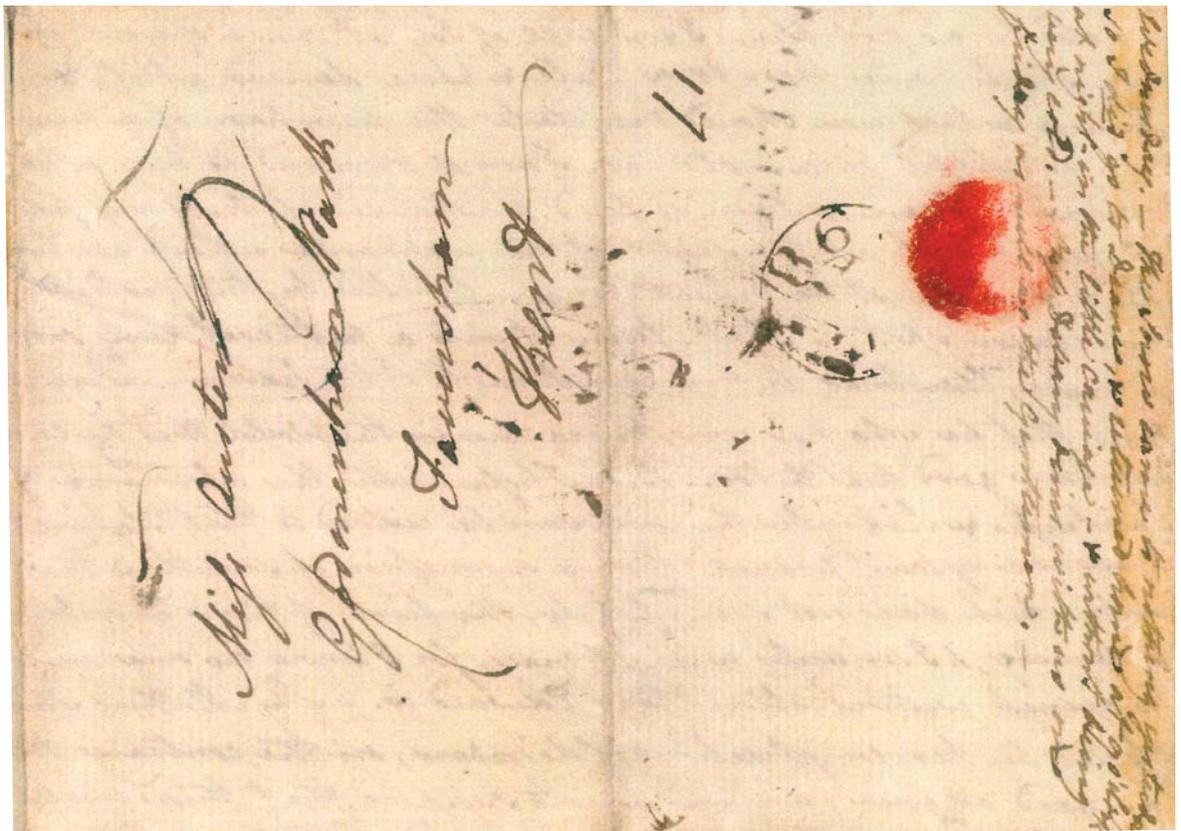
Copies of handwriting samples, written at various stages of Jane's life, from aged 15 to 38, were made available to me. Ideally, and in normal circumstances, I would choose to work from originals or 'first copies' to evaluate the subtleties and nuances that fade in serial reproductions. Without knowing if Jane was taught a specific

'copybook' style I have analysed her writing based on the following assumptions: in 18th century two styles of copperplate writing were common, a 'round hand' for business use and the narrower 'Italian' form, which was considered the ladies' hand. John Seally's *The Running Hand 1770* recommended a sloping 'Italian' with loops, in which all the letters are linked. Expressed in a relatively simple form (minus loops) it was useful for those who needed to write both legibly and speedily. Jane's writing at 15 years old conforms to this and suggests she was either taught or influenced by this style.

As a means of character analysis handwriting analysis is accepted throughout most of Europe, where graphology can be studied as part of psychology degree courses, and in the USA and South America. Many 'blue chip' companies

Right: Front of letter from Jane to Cassandra dated December 24th 1798 communicating "some pleasant news for you,"

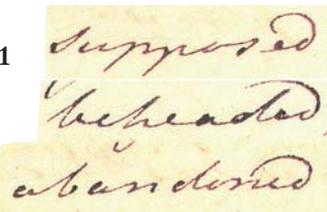
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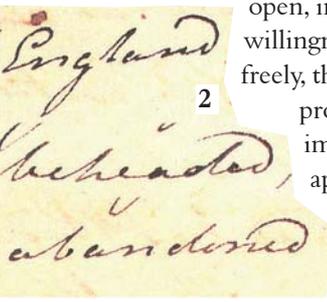
recognise its worth and use it for recruiting and developing staff. However, here in Britain there is still a perception that handwriting analysis is associated with esoteric interests, such as palmistry, rather than psychology. From the texts in Chapter 10 in *Pride and Prejudice* and Chapter 34 in *Emma* it appears Jane was aware of the correlation between handwriting and character. *Appendix 1*

For anyone looking at Jane's handwriting two things are noticeable immediately: the slanting movement and the overall arrangement. Given the speed of her writing, its movement was an unmediated and instant projection. The arrangement demonstrates her capacity for integrating her inner needs and desires with the outer reality. Rapid writing produces extension to the right, which suggests a natural exuberance of speech and communication and an ability to arouse others by rhetoric. This rightward movement also suggests a responsive individual, someone capable of making spur of the moment decisions. Where it is exaggerated further there is potential for possessive or prejudicial behaviour, given the right circumstances.

Not every stroke moves to the right, some

1  return to the left. One of the more noticeable is the elevated, leftward sweeping stroke of the stem of the lower case letter d, written with flourish in the early sample.

Jane may have been taught this style but she did not stick to it slavishly. Other forms she used reveal different aspects of her social self-image¹. Symbolically the upper extension of the letter d is associated with intellectual introspection, imagination and, given its height in the early samples, some vanity. Though the oval part is

2  open, implying a willingness to communicate freely, the regressive, self-protective stem stroke implies some apprehension, distrust or self-denial². As she aged the stem length decreased, which suggests she

knew her own mind and would not have welcomed interference. This independence is often seen in writers who have been over-managed in early life.

The oval part of the letters d, a, g, o and q all

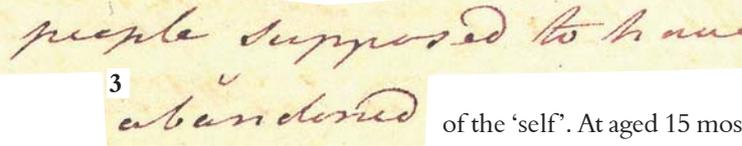
disclose her social communication, her expression of emotions through words, either spoken or



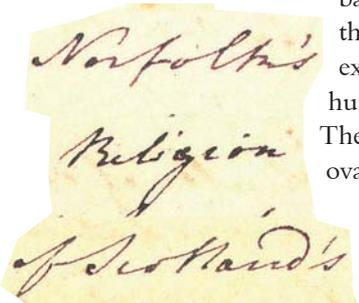
Left: Page from 'A History of England' written by Jane Austen aged 15 and illustrated by her sister Cassandra.

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written. Self-image, or external appearance, relates to the letter a, while the o reveals internal evaluation

3  of the 'self'. At aged 15 most of her communication

letters are open³ but there are several that are ink-filled, and do not appear to be caused by new ink or a soft pen. In puberty these are interpreted as symptoms of emotional disturbance arising from anxiety, guilt or shame. Though generally rounded, some of the ovals have an angular formation at the

4  baseline and there is a theory these imply the experience of humiliation in childhood. The narrowness of these ovals compared to the width of other letters suggests repressed communication.

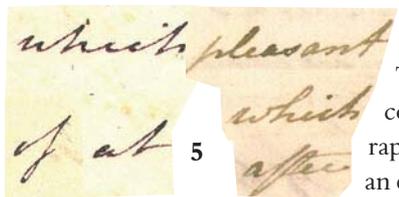
Flooded ovals occur in all Jane's samples and suggest a pre-occupation with keeping a secret⁴. I am not qualified to make an opinion but it is also suggested these 'black

spots' could point to health problems associated with circulation. Though still evident in the sample written to her publisher, generally the ovals were fuller, more rounded, less contaminated and open at

the top, pointing to her frankness.

The combination of fast writing and open ovals indicates her need to communicate. Although she could be sympathetic to other people's ideas, if she experienced difficulty appreciating or accepting them she would offer her own candid opinion: firm and resolute, she may not have been able to control her ardour. The length of her t-bars reveals her enthusiasm but where these end sharply, dagger like, it shows her capacity to release pent up frustrations through either cutting comments or witty stories.

Her sharp intellect reveals itself in the 'needlepoint' stroke at the top of the letter f, h, and t, which suggest she would have absorbed



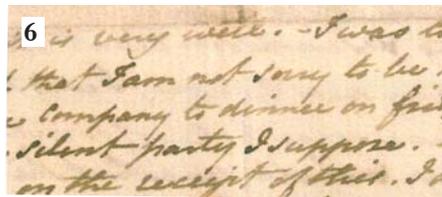
information like a sponge⁵. The combination of rapid thought, and an eagerness to

convey her opinion, may have made her appear over-bearing. She expected too much of herself and could be discontented and niggardly, pursuing her ideas logically whilst shutting off outside influences. While this makes for efficiency it points

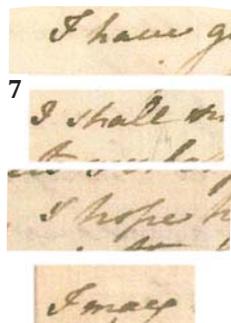
Although she could be sympathetic to other people's ideas, if she experienced difficulty appreciating or accepting them she would offer her own candid opinion.

to an intolerance and autocracy, which may have restricted her relationships, despite her natural desire to be involved.

Her frequent use of the personal pronoun ⁶(PPI) and the heavier pressure it was written with confirms this. The PPI relates to self-image and Jane used



two forms: a simple clockwise loop showing her need for security, status and superiority and one with an additional, small anti-clockwise loop above this⁷,



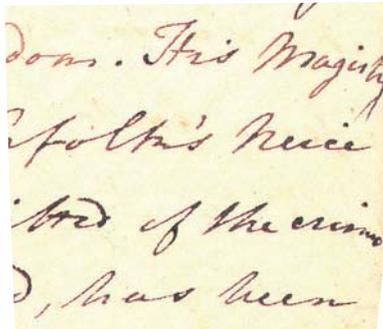
which some graphologists believe is indicative of issues associated with mother.

Perhaps a perceived lack of love and attention was the source of her motivation and drove her to

work fast and furiously. She may have tried, and been successful, at projecting an air of self-assuredness but the fluctuating height of her PPI⁸ suggests at times she felt otherwise. The narrow spacing of her words in the later samples expresses a desire for physical closeness and suggests she may have been intrusive, offering advice or suggestions, without being asked.

The small space between her PPI and the next word points to a desire for personal intimacy and can be found in all the samples⁹.

Generally there is clear spacing between written lines and, in the early sample, between words. These serve as clarifying and articulating factors and provide evidence she was able to control, realistically, some of her more unconstrained behaviour. All the samples of Jane's writing show the ability she possessed to organise herself (and others), her thoughts and actions consistently. Her writing crosses the page in a straight and slightly ascending line, showing determination, conviction and optimism that would have been difficult to deflect her from. People who write in a straight line are productive and able to plan ahead, while keeping matters in perspective and under control, even though they can be impulsive and impassioned.



However, some lines present final letters of words falling over the edge and this points to distaste for restraint or disrespect for elementary forms¹⁰.

In her letters to Cassandra the writing line is well spaced, showing her self-discipline and constructive thinking. Sometimes

order and clarity were sacrificed to her desire for self-expression, as illustrated by the close line

There is no doubting her intelligence but it was strongly influenced by her emotions, her reactions were instinctive and her opinions strong.

spacing in the December 24 sample. Her inclination for page filling is not bound by the size of paper, because she extends final letter strokes or inserts dashes to the end of the line, eliminating all but the upper margin. Not only does this point to self-projection, perhaps without much consideration for the recipient, but also an unwillingness to let go. She could be very focussed in outlook when involved in a task. The developed tails of her letters g, j and y in all samples suggest a materialist outlook, in search for security.

There is no doubting her intelligence but it was strongly influenced by her emotions; her reactions were instinctive and her opinions strong. Her desire to communicate was overwhelming and her early writing points to a strong, energetic and enthusiastic individual. Though equally steadfast, in later years the diminishing pressure of her writing and the lengthening of the upper stem of the letter p suggests her energies were more inclined toward debate and abstract concepts than physical activity¹¹; contentious or pretentious, who knows? ❧

- Age 23 Page 1, Line 3 'pleasant', 'which'. Line 21 'after'.
- 6 Age 23 Page 4, Lines 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 22 and 23 (twice)
- 7 Age 23 Page 1, Lines 3,5,13,19, 21 and 28
- 8 Age 23 Page 1, Lines 13, 14. Line 28
- 9 Age 15 Line 12 'Ihave'
Age 23 Line 14 'Iam', 'Ican'
- 10 Age 15 Lines 6 and 8
Age 23 1st and 2nd lines above address section
- 11 Age 15 Line 24 'happening', 'opinion' (no upper extension)

Appendix 1

'That will not do for a compliment to Darcy, Caroline,' cried her brother- 'because he does not write with ease. He studies too much for words of four syllables. -Do not you, Darcy?'

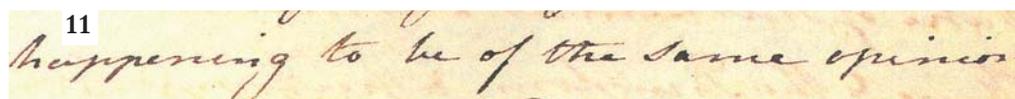
'My style of writing is very different from yours.'

'Oh!' cried Miss Bingley, 'Charles writes in the most careless way imaginable. He leaves out half his words, and blots the rest.' Pride and Prejudice, Chapter 10

The varieties of handwriting were further talked of, and the usual observations made.

'I have heard it asserted,' said John Knightley, 'that the same sort of handwriting often prevails in a family; and where the same master teaches, it is natural enough. But for that reason, I should imagine the likeness must be chiefly confined to the females, for boys have very little teaching after an early age, and scramble into any hand they can get. Isabella and Emma, I think, do write very much alike. I have not always known their writing apart.'

Emma, Chapter 34



References

The handwriting samples are numbered by line by the author

- 1 Age 15 Line 9 (Edward 6th) 'beheaded' Line 10 'supposed' Line 11 'abandoned'
- 2 Age 15 Line 1 'England', Line 9 'beheaded', line 11 'abandoned'
- 3 Age 15 Line 10 'people', 'supposed', 'to', 'have'. Line 11 'abandoned'
- 4 Age 15 Line 4 'Religion'. Line 7 'Norfolk' (one filled, one open). Line 8 'otherwise'. Line 14 'so'. Line 15 'of', 'Scotland'. Line 21 'at' Line 22 'death'
Age 23 (letter to Cassandra 24 Dec) Line 29 'of', 'Gambia', 'to' 'Charles'. Line 30 'poor fellow', 'into', 'nothing'. Line 31 'hope', 'controlled'. Line 32 'prospect', 'out' 'Admiral'.
- 5 Age 15 Line 1 'which'. Line 4 'of', 'at'

With many years experience, Patricia provides personality profiles for recruitment, teambuilding, relationship compatibility and personal development. Patricia tutors for the International Graphology Association and is a member of the British Institute of Graphology and the Association of Qualified Graphologists. She has an MA in medical history.

Patricia has appeared in the media and on TV and radio. Currently, she is working on a book on the projective drawing technique 'tree drawing analysis'.

www.analyse-handwriting.co.uk