

## A Timeline of Historical, Biographical (Austen, Brontë, Dickens, Hardy), and Fictitious Events (from Emma, Jane Eyre, Great Expectations, and Tess of the d'Urbervilles)

### 1800

George III is on the English throne, having reigned since 1760 (and will reign until 1820). The period of George III's kingship is referred to as the Georgian Era. This is complicated by the fact that George III exercises no real power after 1811 when his son (the future George IV) assumes the title of Prince Regent, since George III suffered from periodic bouts of madness and was unfit to rule during the final years of his reign. Thus, the latter parts of George III's reign overlap with what is called the Regency Era.

Napoleon Bonaparte had seized power in France the year before.

**Jane Austen turns twenty-five. She was born in 1775, the seventh child of the Reverend George and Cassandra Austen. 1800 was also the year her father unexpectedly announces his retirement from the ministry. Both Jane and her sister Cassandra are unmarried and living with their parents at the time.**

**Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre begins in November of 1799. Jane is approximately 10 years old. Jane arrives in Lowood in January of 1800. Helen Burns dies in June of the same year.**

### 1801

The British and Irish Parliaments unite into a single state, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

**Jane Austen moves to Bath with her father, mother, and sister Cassandra.**

### 1802

**Just before her twenty-seventh birthday, Jane Austen receives her only marriage proposal. Realizing that the marriage would be good for her family's circumstances, Austen accepts. The next morning, however, she changes her mind and withdraws her acceptance.**

### 1803

Britain declares war on France. Hostilities will continue off and on between the two nations until 1814.

**Jane Austen sells a novel called Susan to a publisher for £10, but the book is never published. Austen's family later buys back the rights to the work.**

### 1804

Napoleon Bonaparte crowns himself Emperor in France.

### 1805

Napoleon gathers forces at Boulogne for invasion of Britain. Third coalition formed by Austria, Russia, Sweden and Britain against France.

**Jane's father William George Austen dies, leaving his wife and sisters financially dependent on his sons. The**

Austen women first rent a house in Bath, then move in with Jane's brother Frank and his wife.

In *Emma*, this is approximately the date of Emma's mother's death, as Mr. Knightly observes that Emma has been mistress of the house since she was 12.

In *Jane Eyre*, Jane becomes a teacher in Lowood in this year at approximately age 16. Miss Temple would have been about this age or a little older when Jane knew her in 1800.

1806

In *Emma*, this is the year that Isabella Woodhouse marries John Knightley.

1807

The slave trade is abolished in Britain.

In *Jane Eyre*, Jane travels to Thornfield for the first time in October of this year. She is 18 years old.

1808

In *Jane Eyre*, Jane meets Edward Rochester for the first time in January. He is twenty years older than her, so approximately 38. He had married Bertha Mason in October of 1793 when he was 23. Mr. Rochester proposes to Jane in

June, and the wedding date is set for July. Jane is taken into Moor House in August.

1809

Jane and Cassandra Austen and their mother move into Chawton Cottage, a home on an estate owned by their brother Edward.

In *Jane Eyre*, the events of the final third of the book occur during this year (except for the last chapter).

1810

France issues the Decree of Fontainebleau which authorizes confiscation of British goods and shipping.

Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* begins on Christmas Eve in approximately 1810. Pip is seven at the beginning of the novel. Mrs. Joe is about twenty years older than him. Joe is approximately the same age. The convict is about forty-five when Pip encounters him.

1811

The future George IV (son of monarch George III) assumes the title of Prince Regent, governing for his father in George III's final period of incapacity. This begins

the Regency Era in British history, which extends from this point through the reigns of George III's two sons (George IV and William IV), ending in 1837 when Queen Victoria ascends to the throne.

Luddites (said to be named after Ned Ludd, an apprentice who allegedly smashed two stocking frames in 1779) smash spinning and weaving machinery in the north of England. The movement spreads to other industrial areas.

Jane Austen anonymously publishes *Sense and Sensibility*.

In *Emma*, Mr. Elton enters the neighborhood in December of this year.

1812

Americans invade Canada, starting the War of 1812 with Britain.

Charles Dickens is born, the second child of John and Elizabeth Dickens.

1813

Jane Austen anonymously publishes *Pride and Prejudice*. It is a re-working of an earlier unpublished novel, *First Impressions*, written in 1796 and 1797.

Jane Austen's *Emma* takes place over about a year from 1813 to 1814. Emma is

21 when the novel opens. Jane Fairfax is the same age. Frank Churchill is approximately the same age as both or slightly older. A line from the novel implies that Isabella is seven years older than Emma. Harriet is 17. Robert Martin is 24. George Knightly is 37. Mr. Woodhouse is over 60. The Taylor-Weston marriage referred to in the opening of the novel had taken place in late September or early October. Mr. Martin proposes to Harriet in December, and Mr. Elton proposes to Emma on December 25 and leaves for Bath on December 28.

## 1814

Napoleon is defeated by the Sixth Coalition and goes into exile in Elba.

In the United States, the British occupy Washington and burn White House. Americans are forced to sue for peace and end the war. The British agree to return to the status quo before the conflict with the Treaty of Ghent.

Jane Austen anonymously publishes *Mansfield Park*.

In *Emma*, Jane Fairfax arrives in late January or early February, not having visited since January 1812; she receives the pianoforte on Valentine's Day. Mr. Elton returns to Highbury in early March,

and the dinner party that concludes Volume II takes place on April 7. The ball is planned for the second week of May, and the fallout from that event plays out between May and July. The wedding that concludes the novel takes place in the end of October.

The Dickens family's youngest child, a six-month-old boy named Alfred, dies of a brain inflammation. Charles' father John Dickens is transferred to London, and the family moves there.

## 1815

Napoleon escapes from exile, but months later is defeated by a British led coalition army at the Battle of Waterloo some months later. This event marks the end of Napoleonic wars, as Napoleon goes into exile for a second time (at Saint Helena), where he remains until his death in 1821.

The librarian of the Prince Regent (later King George IV), a big fan of Jane Austen's work, invites her to the prince's London home and suggests that she dedicate her soon-to-be-published book to him. Austen is not a fan of the prince, but is unable to say no. Jane Austen anonymously publishes *Emma* later that year. The novel is dedicated to the Prince Regent.

## 1816

Jane Austen begins to feel the first signs of a long, progressive illness that saps her energy. She continues to work on her final two novels, *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey*, but is delayed by her illness and by financial troubles caused by the failure of her brother Henry's bank.

Charlotte Brontë is born, the third daughter of Patrick and Maria Branwell Brontë.

## 1817

Widespread disturbances and riots occur due to economic difficulties.

Jane Austen dies at the age of 41.

In *Great Expectations*, Pip would be approximately 14 when Miss Havisham pays for Pip to be Joe's apprentice. Miss Havisham is approximately 40 when Pip first meets her. Biddy and Estella are approximately the same age as Pip.

## 1819

In *Jane Eyre*, the last chapter of the novel is set at this date. Jane is approximately 30 years old.

## 1820

George III dies, and his son the Prince Regent ascends to the throne as George IV. George IV will reign until 1830.

**The Brontë family moves to Haworth, West Yorkshire, where Patrick Brontë has become rector.**

## 1821

**Charlotte Brontë's mother Maria dies of cancer; her sister, Elizabeth Branwell, moves in with the family.**

Charles Dickens enrolls in classes at a school next door to his family's home.

In *Great Expectations*, Pip is 18 when Jaggers takes him to London. Herbert is approximately the same age as Pip. Jaggers would be in his late 30s or early 40s, and Wemmick would be a few years younger than him.

## 1822

Michael Faraday invents the electric motor.

## 1823

The death penalty for one hundred crimes is removed from English statute books.

Owing to John Dickens's numerous debts, he is unable to afford to send his son Charles back to school. His mother opens her own girls' school in an effort to earn more money for the family, but is unable to attract even a single student.

## 1824

Portland Cement is developed by Joseph Aspdin.

**Patrick Brontë sends his two oldest daughters, Elizabeth and Maria, to school at Wakefield. They then transfer to the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge, Lancashire. Charlotte and Emily join them here; it will be the model for the school in *Jane Eyre*. Elizabeth and Maria both return home, to die of consumption.**

Two days after his twelfth birthday, Charles Dickens starts a job labeling jars of shoe polish in a factory. Despite a desperate attempt on behalf of his family to raise the money to keep him out of jail, John Dickens is committed to a debtor's prison for his failure to repay a debt of 40 pounds. The Dickens family pawns everything they own. Elizabeth Dickens and the four youngest children move in to John's prison cell. Charles takes a room at a boarding house, using his income from the boot-black factory to pay his room and board. A few

months later, after earning a small inheritance, John Dickens is able to negotiate with his creditors and secure his release from jail. The family moves into the boarding house where Charles had been living. Charles enrolls in school again in June.

## 1825

The world's first public passenger railway opens in the north of England.

**Charlotte and Emily Brontë return home. To amuse themselves, they fill thousands of pages in miniature books with fictions about the imaginary Kingdom of Angria. Their brother, Branwell (born 1817), and their youngest sister, Anne (born 1820), eventually help develop the stories, which occupy the girls well into their twenties.**

In *Great Expectations*, Magwitch reveals himself to Pip, having returned from Australia the previous year. He is about 60 years old. Pip is about 22.

## 1826

The University of London is opened.

Photographs are being produced on metal plates by Nicéphore Niépce in France.

Another round of financial troubles forces Charles Dickens and his elder sister Fanny to withdraw from school. Soon after, the Dickens family is evicted from their London home.

In *Great Expectations*, the events of the final third of the novel occur (except for the last chapter). During this time, Pip, Estella, Herbert, and Biddy would be about 23. Joe would be about twenty years older. Miss Havisham is about 55. Jaggers and Wemmick would be in their 50s.

1827

Charles Dickens takes a job as a law clerk to bolster the family's income. He also starts spending time around London's theater district.

1828

Dickens leaves his job at a law office to work as a freelance reporter. Over the next few years, he writes for several London newspapers.

1829

Britain claims the entire Australian continent as a British preserve.

The Catholic Emancipation Act gives Catholics civil rights.

1830

George IV dies and his brother ascends to the throne as William IV. Historians still consider this period the Regency Era, however. William IV will reign until 1837.

Robert Brown discovers the cell nucleus in plants.

Charlotte Brontë attends Miss Wooler's school at Roe Head, near Huddersfield.

Charles Dickens falls in love with a young woman named Maria Beadnell. Her well-to-do parents disapprove of the relationship and send her to school in Paris to keep her away from Dickens.

1832

The Great Reform Act is passed. Seats in parliament are distributed more fairly, and male members of the middle class are given the vote.

1833

Slavery is abolished throughout the British Empire.

The first steamer crosses the Atlantic Ocean.

Dickens, by now a major theater buff, stars in and also stage-manages three

amateur plays. His three-year romance with Maria Beadnell ends a month later. Dickens' first piece of fiction, the short story "A Dinner at Poplar Walk," appears anonymously in *Old Monthly Magazine*. He publishes several more stories in the magazine over the next several months.

1835

Charlotte Brontë works at Roe Head as a teacher, earning money for her family, particularly to fund her brother Branwell's studies in art.

1836

Charles Dickens begins publishing his *Sketches by Boz*, a collection of written pieces. He also publishes his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*. Dickens also marries Catherine Hogarth, the daughter of a colleague at his newspaper the *Morning Chronicle*.

1837

William the IV dies. Queen Victoria (daughter of Prince Edward-- fourth son of George III, brother to George the IV and William the IV) ascends to the English throne. This begins the Victorian Era, which lasts until Queen Victoria's death in 1901. Sometimes the term "Victorian" will be used imprecisely, to refer to the entirety of the

19<sup>th</sup> century and/or this time period in the United States.

Euston becomes London's first railway station.

**Charles Dickens publishes *Oliver Twist*.**

**In *Great Expectations*, the events of the last chapter occur. Pip is about 34.**

**1838**

Louis Daguerre creates the earliest photograph to include people.

**Charlotte Brontë resigns her position at Roe Head and returns to Haworth.**

**1839**

The First Opium War begins with China. It will last until 1842.

**Charlotte Brontë turns down two marriage proposals.**

**Charles Dickens publishes *Nicolas Nickleby*.**

**1840**

Queen Victoria marries Prince Albert, second son of the duke of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld in present day Germany.

**Charles Dickens publishes *The Old Curiosity Shop*.**

**Thomas Hardy is born.**

**1842**

Hong Kong is ceded to the British as a consequence of China losing the First Opium War.

Riots and strikes occur in the industrial North.

A new law bans women and children from working underground in mines.

**Charlotte and Emily Brontë go to Brussels to study French and German at the Pensionnat Heger. Soon their aunt, Miss Branwell, dies, leaving each niece and nephew a small sum; this enables both to return home. Charlotte then returns to Brussels alone, but is lonely and depressed. She forms an attachment to Constantin Heger, the head of the school, whose stimulating and sophisticated mind appeals to her. He wounds her by mistaking her devotion for love. Madame Heger's jealousy necessitates her departure.**

**1843**

**Charles Dickens publishes *The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit* and the short novel *A Christmas Carol*.**

**1844**

**Charlotte Brontë tries to start a school at the Haworth parsonage, but no pupils come.**

**1845**

The Irish Potato Famine begins, lasting until 1848. It inaugurates wide-scale emigration of Irish families to England and the United States.

**1846**

**Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë publish at their own expense a joint volume of *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell*, using pseudonyms. Only two copies are sold. Charlotte's novel *The Professor* is rebuffed by publishers. She begins *Jane Eyre* while caring for her father's recovery from an eye operation.**

**Charles Dickens publishes *Dombey and Sons*.**

1847

A new law bans women and children from working more than 10 hours a day.

Charlotte Brontë publishes *Jane Eyre* under a pseudonym.

1848

There are cholera epidemics in British towns. The Health Act is passed.

Both Branwell and Emily Brontë die. Before her death, Emily infects Anne with consumption. Charlotte, interrupting her writing on her new novel, *Shirley*, attempts to nurse Anne back to health.

Thomas Hardy begins attending Julia Martin's school in Bockhampton.

1849

Anne Brontë dies of consumption. Charlotte finishes and publishes *Shirley* under a pseudonym.

Charles Dickens publishes *David Copperfield*.

1850

Thomas Hardy attends school in Dorchester.

1851

Charlotte Brontë travels to London three times as guest of her publisher. She journeys to the Lake Country, to Scotland, and to Manchester, where she visits the novelist Elizabeth Gaskell, her future biographer. She also rejects a marriage proposal from James Taylor, a member of her publishing house.

The Dickens family suffers numerous hardships this year. Charles' wife Catherine endures a nervous breakdown, and both Charles's father, John, and his nine-month-old daughter, Dora, die.

1852

Charles Dickens publishes *Bleak House*. His and Catherine's tenth (and final) child is born.

1853

Charlotte Brontë publishes *Villette* under a pseudonym.

1854

The Crimean War begins in which Britain and France unite to defeat the Russians. It ends in 1856.

Charlotte Brontë marries her fourth suitor, Arthur Bell Nichols, her father's

curate, who does not share her intellectual interests but who makes her happy. She begins but does not finish a novel, *Emma*.

Charles Dickens publishes *Hard Times*.

1855

Charlotte Brontë dies in pregnancy at age 38.

1856

The Second Opium War with China begins. It ends in 1860.

Henry Bessemer invents a way of converting pig iron to steel.

Thomas Hardy is apprenticed to a local architect, John Hicks, in Dorchester.

1857

Charles Dickens publishes *Little Dorrit*. Dickens meets the actress Ellen "Nelly" Ternan, who is working on a production of one of his plays. They begin a romantic relationship that lasts for the rest of Dickens' life. Dickens and his wife Catherine agree to separate the following year.

**1858**

Direct British rule is inaugurated in India (the British Raj).

The hypodermic syringe is invented by Alexander Wood. Vaccination against smallpox becomes compulsory in Britain.

**1859**

Charles Darwin publishes *The Origin of Species*. It outlines his theory of evolution.

**Charles Dickens publishes *A Tale of Two Cities*.**

**1860**

The Belgian Étienne Lenoir constructs the first practical internal combustion engine.

HMS Warrior, Britain's first iron warship is launched.

**1861**

Prince Albert dies.

**Charles Dickens publishes *Great Expectations*. The narrator of the novel is supposed to relating its events from approximately this time as well, so Pip would be about 58 looking back on events from his youth.**

**1862**

**Thomas Hardy travels to London to work as a draughtsman under Arthur Blomfield. While finding his way in London he attends the Exhibition. He explores the cultural life of London, visiting museums, attending plays and operas, and begins writing poetry in earnest.**

**1863**

The first (steam driven) underground train opens in London.

**In the same year, Charles Dickens loses his mother, Elizabeth, as well as his fourth child, Walter, who is a soldier in Calcutta.**

**1865**

Joseph Lister invents antiseptic surgery.

**Charles Dickens publishes *Our Mutual Friend*. He begins work on *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, but it will remain unfinished at the time of his death.**

**1867**

The Second Reform Act extends the vote to urban male head of households, including members of the working class.

**Thomas Hardy returns to Dorset and works for Hicks. Hardy begins considering writing as a profession and writes the unpublished novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady*.**

**1869**

The Suez Canal is opened.

**1870**

Undersea cabling proliferates to connect overland telegraphs, creating a worldwide network.

**Charles Dickens dies at age 58.**

**Hardy meets Emma Gifford in St. Juliot's, north Cornwall.**

**1871**

**Thomas Hardy anonymously publishes *Desperate Remedies*.**

**1872**

The secret ballot is introduced.

**Thomas Hardy anonymously publishes *Under the Greenwood Tree*. It is well received.**

**1873**

The Great Depression (sometimes called the Long Depression, to distinguish it from the worldwide depression of the 1930s) begins in Great Britain. The depression was caused by the dramatic fall in grain prices following the opening up of the American prairies to cultivation in the 1870s and the advent of cheap transportation with the rise of steamships. It will last until 1896, though prices will not truly recover until after WWII. This is the most important historical context for *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (though the novel actually begins in 1884).

**Thomas Hardy publishes *A Pair of Blue Eyes* under his own name. Hardy now relinquishes architecture as a career to write full-time.**

**1874**

**Thomas Hardy publishes *Far from the Madding Crowd*, his first mature novel. Hardy marries Emma Gifford, travels to Paris, and sets up house in London.**

**1875**

Alexander Graham Bell patents the telephone.

A law bans the practice of sending small boys up chimneys to clean them. From now

on you have to be over 21 to clean a chimney that way.

The third Public Health Act is passed. Conditions in towns and cities are slowly getting better. In the 1870s and 1880s networks of sewers are dug and water pipes are laid. Gas light becomes common even in the poorest homes.

**1876**

**Thomas Hardy publishes *The Hand of Ethelberta*. Hardy settles at Sturminster Newton, Dorset.**

**1877**

In the United States, Thomas Edison invents the phonograph.

**1878**

**Thomas Hardy publishes *Return of the Native*. He is living in London again. Hardy begins to experience life as a celebrity. He joins the Saville Club.**

**1879**

The Anglo-Zulu War begins in present day South Africa. It lasts until the following year.

London's first telephone exchange is established.

**1880**

Canned fruits and meats become widely available. Joseph Swan and Thomas Edison independently invent the first practical incandescent light bulb.

**Thomas Hardy publishes *The Trumpet Major*. Hardy meets Robert Browning and Alfred, Lord Tennyson, the two most famous English poets of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.**

**1881**

**Thomas Hardy publishes *A Laodicean*. Hardy returns to Dorset.**

**In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Angel Clare surrenders the prospect of Cambridge during this year (at age 20).**

**1882**

**Thomas Hardy publishes *Two on a Tower*.**

**1884**

New Guinea becomes a British Protectorate.

The Third Reform Act extends the reforms of the 1867 Second Reform Act to the countryside. However, all women and

approximately 40% of adult males were still without the vote.

**Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* begins on May 30, 1884 when John Durbeyfield learns that he is "Sir John." Tess is 16 when the novel begins; Liza-Lu is 13; Angel Clare is 23; and Alec d'Urberville is 24. Tess takes a position at the d'Urberville farm on June 1, and flees after her rape on September 27.**

**1885**

**Thomas Hardy moves into Max Gate, the home he designed and had built on the outskirts of Dorchester, Dorset.**

**In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Sorrow is born in June and dies in August.**

**1886**

**Thomas Hardy publishes *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Hardy continues to meet literary figures in London.**

**1887**

**Thomas Hardy publishes *The Woodlanders*. Hardy tours the continent. When they return, he begins habit of visiting London for "the season."**

**In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Tess arrives at Talbothays Dairy in May. She is now**

**19 and Angel is 26. By October, the two are engaged, and they marry on December 31.**

**1888**

Borneo becomes a British Protectorate.

Radio waves are discovered by the German Heinrich Hertz.

Girls who make match boxes successfully strike.

**Thomas Hardy publishes *Wessex Tales*, a collection of short stories.**

**In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Angel sails for Brazil on January 28. The events of the final third of the novel occur over the next year and a half.**

**1889**

Gas workers successfully strike. London dockworkers successfully strike. For the first time unskilled workers are forming successful trade unions.

**In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, the events of the last two chapters occur in June and July of this year.**

**1890**

Zanzibar becomes a British Protectorate.

The first electric underground trains run in London.

**1891**

Wireless telegraphy begins.

**Thomas Hardy publishes *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. He also publishes *A Group of Noble Dames*, a collection of short stories.**

**1892**

**Some critics publish negative reviews of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, citing its immorality. Hardy's father dies, and his relationship with Emma becomes increasingly difficult.**

**1893**

**Thomas Hardy forms a close friendship with society hostess Florence Henniker.**

**1894**

Uganda and Gambia becomes British Protectorates.

**Thomas Hardy publishes *Life's Little Ironies*, a collection of short stories.**

1895

Thomas Hardy publishes *Jude the Obscure*. Hardy begins working on uniform edition of his works.

1896

Sierra Leone becomes a British Protectorate.

Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* severely criticized for immorality. Hardy revises his other novels, especially *The Well-Beloved*.

1897

Thomas Hardy publishes his first uniform edition, but he gives up novel-writing (in large part to the criticism he had received for *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*). Today, these are generally seen as his most important novels. Henceforth, Hardy only publishes poetry, plays, and short stories.

1898

Thomas Hardy publishes *Wessex Poems and Other Verses*.

1899

The Second Boer War begins in present-day South Africa. It lasts until 1902.

Kuwait becomes a British Protectorate. Britain seizes effective control over the Sudan.

Queen Victoria will die two years later in 1901, bringing to an end the Victoria Era.

Thomas Hardy turns 59. He will live until 1928, when he dies at the age of 87. He was awarded the Order of Merit in 1910 and was twice nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature.