

## [Men Wore Corsets and 7 Other Unknown Things About the World of Jane Austen](#)

Art/Bks/Film

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How much have things changed since Jane Austen held forth as the premier novelist is clearly shown in this quote from Vicky Gan's article: "The lower one's rank, the more physically demanding the work; scullery maids, lowest of the female servants, were expected to clean and scour the kitchen for 18 hours a day." Illustration: Portrait of Jane Austen, from the memoir by J. E. Austen-Leigh. Image from Wikimedia Commons

By [Vicky Gan](#) for the SMITHSONIAN.COM With Jane Austen [confirmed as](#) the next face of England's ten-pound note and yet another Austen-themed film [on the way](#), the global phenomenon surrounding the novelist shows no signs of abating. Recently, a group of D.C.-area fans indulged their Austenmania at the [Smithsonian Associates](#) seminar, "Life at Pemberley: Ever After with Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth." Sandra Lerner, founder of the [Chawton House Library](#) and author of *Second Impressions* (a sequel to *Pride and Prejudice*), served as mistress of ceremonies and covered matters mundane and monumental in the life and times of Jane Austen. Below, dear readers, are some of the insights she had to offer: **Jane Austen didn't have a clue about money.** She wrote during the Regency era (1775-1817), when England was in the throes of the Industrial Revolution, mass rural-to-urban migration, and transition from a barter to a cash economy. People from all walks of life struggled to adjust to the new paradigm. The wealthy, who had no concept of cash, took to gambling and often accrued astronomical debts. Jane Austen lived in the country, where the subject of money was still strictly taboo, and the fuzzy figures in her novels reflect her financial ignorance. According to Lerner, Mr. Darcy's income of £10,000 a year was grossly unrealistic for a time when even a politician like Charles Fox held more than £100,000 in debt. Lerner estimates that Darcy would have needed an income of at least ten times as much to manage both his London house and his Pemberley estate. **Men wore corsets.** Gentlemen as well as ladies shaped their waists in the Regency era. Ladies' corsets were relatively forgiving, providing lift rather than Victorian-era constriction.

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