

Austen revered in historic British town she called home

By Kathryn Reed

BATH, England – “By a lady” – that is how many female authors used to receive credit for their literary works.

For Jane Austen, who died at the age of 41, much of her success came late in her life. And the worldwide recognition came years after she died in 1817.

Knowing I was going to be traveling to the part of the world where she once lived, I thought it time to revisit “Pride and Prejudice” – a book I had not read since I had to in school many years ago.



Jane Austen Centre in Bath, England, tells the story of this author's life.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

Mr. Darcy, Mr. Bingley and the whole Bennet family come to life in this 292-page classic. I had forgotten who was good, bad and what happens to Elizabeth and her sisters. It was so wonderful to reconnect with this cast of characters.

Reading this nearly 200 years after it was first published (the first printing was in January 1813) seemed surreal. The artistry of her words, the descriptions, her imagination – it reads like a time period novel, not a novel written in another time.

While “Pride and Prejudice” does not have a ton of references to Bath, five of her six novels do mention this historic British city.

Bath has turned a house down the street from where Austen and her family resided into a museum of sorts called the Jane Austen Centre. (Cost: 6 pounds.) So entranced with what they call their most famous resident, Bath puts on the Jane Austen Festival each September. She lived in the city from 1801-06.

Only one image of the author exists – a sketch her sister drew.

But plenty is known about this era and how Austen’s work became published. A swing through the center is worthwhile for anyone who is slightly interested in Austen.

As for “Pride and Prejudice”, well, it is a great classic where readers will learn about a time long ago in England, the ways men courted women, the oddities of inheritance and familial relationships.

It may be time for another Austen novel to be on the nightstand.