

## Did a meeting with a meteorologist leave Austen inspired?

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Luke Howard travelled through Chawton, Hampshire — where Jane Austen lived — in 1813

Was Jane Austen a closet weather geek? In 1802 Luke Howard made a groundbreaking study in meteorology when he gave names to the clouds and showed how they developed, work that became a huge inspiration for many writers and artists (Weather Eye, [November 28](#)). And there has been speculation that Jane Austen may also have been inspired.

On July 22, 1813 Howard visited Alton in Hampshire and travelled through Chawton, where Austen lived. In fact he would have passed right in front of her house. There is no evidence that they ever met, but the question remains tantalising.

Howard was involved in political campaigning and worked with the anti-slavery movement, was against capital punishment and after the devastation of the Napoleonic wars helped to raise donations for the hardship suffered in Germany. He was also a Quaker with links to the Lloyd and Barclay banking families — which eventually became two of the largest banks in Britain. When Howard visited Alton there were Barclays living there, so it's likely that he went there to meet them. Interestingly, Jane Austen's brother Henry was also a banker and must have known the Barclays, and he too was an anti-slavery campaigner.

Maybe it is just wishful speculation, but after Howard's journey through Chawton, Jane Austen's letters started to become full of descriptions of the weather, and her novel *Emma*, published in 1816, was rich in weather events that drove the storyline, including an unusually cold summer. "The evening of this day was very long, and melancholy, at Hartfield. The weather added what it could of gloom. A cold stormy rain set in, and nothing of July appeared but in the trees and shrubs, which the wind was despoiling, and the length of the day, which only made such cruel sights the longer visible."

In fact, that dreadful weather was a true reflection of the weather recorded by Luke Howard in 1814 when Austen was writing *Emma*.