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The Probable Location of ‘Donwell Abbey’ in Jane Austen’s *Emma*.

Is it possible from the clues that Jane Austen provides in the novel *Emma* to say where Donwell Abbey is in the county of Surrey in England or for that matter to identify other locations that Austen appears to give in her other novels (Smith 2006)? Austen scholarship seems adamant that this is not possible (Le Faye, 2003: 152) and gives as the authority for saying this none other than R. W. Chapman, the editor of the standard 20th century edition of Austen’s novels. This essay argues that the currently dominant view is incorrect—that Chapman got this point badly wrong—and that it is possible to locate Donwell Abbey and by extension from this to identify the nearby village of ‘Highbury’ in the novel and even Emma’s home Hartfield House. Donwell Abbey is in fact a former stately home called Claremont Park in Surrey, Highbury is the nearby town of Esher, and Hartfield House a property now known as Esher Place.

This is what Chapman has to say on this subject in his introduction to the third edition of *Emma* published in 1966.

Highbury has been identified with Cobham, Leatherhead, Esher and other places; and it has been pointed out that there is a house called Randalls near Leatherhead, and that the pulpit of the church there was restored in 1761 by a Mr Knightley (Austen, *Life*, 302). Miss Austen doubtless knew these facts but from our knowledge of her accuracy we are bound to believe that if she had intended any actual place she would have given the distance correctly; *in fact, no possible place is at once 16 miles from London, 9 from Richmond and 7 from Box Hill*; the precision of these figures was perhaps designed to preclude the possibility of a false identification (Chapman, 1966: 521; *emphasis added*).

In fact however what Chapman says here considerably understates the precision of the details that Austen gives us to the probable location of Donwell / Highbury since Austen does not merely say that Highbury is '16 miles from London' but from a named street in London, Brunswick Square, nearby to the much better known Russell Square. Just as in *Pride and Prejudice* then where Austen tells us that 'Longbourn' is exactly 24 miles from a named street in London, Gracechurch Street, the home of Mr and Mrs Gardiner, so in *Emma* we are told exactly how far Highbury is from a named street in London. Also what Chapman says here about Austen's accuracy does not quite ring true and seems rather to be used against her. From our knowledge of her accuracy he says 'we are bound to believe that if she had intended any actual place she would have given the distance correctly'. Well yes indeed, so why then don't we? And he goes on to suggest that 'the precision of these figures was perhaps designed to preclude the possibility of a false identification'. But why then name two actual streets in London? Why not make up satirical names for these location as Austen had already done for 'Longbourn' (Mr and Mrs Bennet's marriage) and 'Donwell' (Done well). Something just is not quite right here.

Let us therefore look in more details at the clues given in *Emma*. Austen gives us our first clue to the location of Highbury, 'a large and populous village almost amounting to a town', on only the second page of *Emma*, where she also tells us that 'Hartfield', Emma's home, is the principle house of that town. We are told that Hartfield is 'only sixteen miles' (Ch.1: 2) from the place in London where Emma's older sister Isabella lives. By itself this information would not have been of very much use to us by itself. London is after all a very large city indeed and was even in Austen's day and this measure might have been taken from the centre of London or from its boundary with the county of Surrey. However, on the very next page of the

novel, and rather remarkably as we will see, we are told *exactly* where Isabella Woodhouse and her husband Mr John Knightley live in London. This is said to be in Brunswick Square (Ch.1: 3), and since there is in fact only one Brunswick Square in London, it is a relatively easy matter to locate this unambiguously. Later on in the novel, and in fact on more than one occasion (Ch.11: 1; Ch.25: 1; and Ch.32: 2), we are told that ‘Highbury’ is in the county of Surrey, and it is therefore a relatively easy matter to draw the arc of a line 16 miles through the county of Surrey that has Brunswick Square in London at its centre.

The second piece of firm evidence to the location of Highbury is given in *Emma* (Ch.37: 2) where the town of Richmond is mentioned. Since London does not agree with Mrs Churchill’s nerves, Mr and Mrs Churchill, and therefore also Frank Weston-Churchill, are to move to Richmond from a house which they have temporarily rented in Manchester Street in London. Frank is said by Austen to be looking forward to having ‘two months before him of such near neighbourhood’ [to Highbury], and Mr Weston is delighted by the close proximity. Austen says, ‘it was the very circumstances he could have wished for. Now it would be really having Frank in their neighbourhood. What were nine miles to a young man’ (Ch.37: 2). Once again, as with the distance of Highbury to Brunswick Square, the reader cannot help notice just how precise Austen is in the distances given. Unless she had an actual place in mind, why should Austen say *nine* miles, rather than the more rounded ten (or she might have said ‘about ten miles from Richmond’]? And unless it was an actual place, why say Highbury is 16 miles from Brunswick Square rather than round this down to fifteen or up to twenty? The distances given therefore strongly support the idea that Highbury is an *actual* place exactly nine miles from Richmond-upon-Thames, neither more nor less, and what is more this is a place which we are *meant* to be able to

identify for ourselves. It is then a simple matter to draw the arc of a second line on our map of Surrey, but this time with Richmond at its centre, and to see where this line intersects the one we have already drawn exactly 16 miles from Brunswick Square in London.ⁱ

The third piece of evidence that Austen gives to the precise location of Hartfield / Highbury is given at the beginning of chapter 43 of the novel when Emma, together with the Elton's and Miss Bates etc. go on a day trip to the well-known Surrey beauty spot of Box Hill. The party set off from Hartfield and the vicarage, and Austen tells us that 'Seven miles were travelled in expectation of enjoyment' (Ch. 43: 1), and once again it is a relatively easy matter to draw the arc of a line seven miles long through the county of Surrey this time in a northerly direction with Box Hill at its centre.

As Chapman says then, Austen does indeed give very precise details to the location of Highbury / Donwell in the novel but, contrary to what Chapman says, this precision would seem to suggest that Austen did indeed have an actual place in mind. Why say nine miles for example when, if this was an invention, one might just as easily say ten, and why say 16 miles rather than 15 or 20? Mere verisimilitude might do as an explanation for this of course since 16, nine and seven miles look more authentic perhaps than 15, ten and five. But one thing that Chapman says in the above reference is badly wrong. Providing only that these distances of the lines drawn are long enough to intersect, it simply *cannot* be the case—the laws of geometry will not allow this—that '*no* possible place is at once 16 miles from London, nine miles from Richmond and seven from Box Hill', as Chapman claimed, but rather there must in fact be *some* place that corresponds to these directions even if this is only a place of no particular significance or interest to us. And, as a matter of fact, and contrary to what

Chapman says, the intersection of any *two* such lines would be more than enough to settle the matter (triangulation providing the location of the third point) unless by some chance the arc of two such lines happened to intersect at two places; as does sometimes happen (see below).

II.

Is it then in fact possible to find in the county of Surrey in England—and Austen tells us clearly in *Emma* that Highbury and Donwell are supposed to be in Surrey, just as she tells us clearly in *Pride and Prejudice* that Longbourn and Meryton are supposed to be in Hertfordshire—a place that is exactly 16 miles from Brunswick Square in London, while also being simultaneously nine miles from the town of Richmond in Surrey and seven miles from Box Hill? The answer to this question is that yes in fact it is—these three lines are indeed long enough to intersect (see Map.1) and therefore, providing only that we can rely on the accuracy of the distances Austen gives in the novel, the one and only place where the arc of these three lines meet *must* be the location that Austen had in mind for the location of Highbury and Donwell Abbey in *Emma*.

Where then are Highbury and Donwell Abbey if Austen did in fact have any actual place in mind? There are *two* points (see Map 1) at which a line seven miles long and drawn in a northerly direction from Box Hill (to the south of the county of Surrey) intersects with a line nine miles long and drawn in a southerly direction from Richmond (in the north of the county) and these two places are, to the west, a large landed estate called Claremont Park, just to the south west of the town of Esher in Surrey and, to the east, a place called Howell Hill, on the road between Ewell and Cheam, and not too far from the town of Epsom. However only *one* of these two

possible locations between Richmond and Box Hill, that of Claremont Park to the west of the county, *also* intersects with a third line drawn exactly 16 miles from Brunswick Square in London in the direction of the County of Surrey (see Map.1). If then we can take all of Austen's map references seriously—if we do not say that she simply made these up from her own imagination or that she was mistaken—these three map references taken together strongly suggest that Claremont Park, is the location of Donwell Abbey, the home of Mr George Knightly in the novel, and that therefore the nearby town of Esher (interestingly enough one of the many possible locations mentioned by Chapman) must also be the location of Highbury; no other place is Surrey being exactly these distances from London, Richmond and Box Hill.

Of course when Austen says that Richmond is exactly nine miles from Highbury and 16 miles from Brunswick Square, we don't know whether she means in a straight line ('as the crow flies' as people say in England) or as one would travel this distances by road. The distance by road seems to be the more likely given that Austen herself frequently travelled from her home in Hampshire to London via Esher and Richmond. Oddly enough however, it turns out that this possible objection makes remarkably little difference to the distance from Richmond to Esher or from London to Esher since the road from Richmond into Surrey is exceptionally straight for an English road and even the road from Surrey to London—which is in fact the main London to Portsmouth route and the very road that Austen herself would have used to travel into London from Hampshire—is also remarkably straight at this point. It is only when we come to the third location that there seems to be any difficulty, since the road to Box Hill from Esher is in fact very winding indeed and therefore likely to be much longer by road—though over a relatively short distance travelled—than the distance between these two points in a straight line.

As the crow flies, a straight line nine miles from Richmond passes about one mile beyond Esher but falls directly onto the grounds of Claremont Park. However, if we make an allowance for bends in the road, the distance from the Bear public house in the centre of Esher is exactly nine miles to Richmond Bridge in the centre of Richmond. A straight line drawn sixteen miles from Brunswick Square in London passes about a mile beyond Claremont Park, and therefore two miles beyond Esher, but falls much nearer to Esher than this when measured by road. Today it is almost impossible to work out how far Esher was by road from London in Austen's day due to two hideous new one-way systems which disfigure Kingston-upon-Thames and the Vauxhall Bridge Road in London and which force the driver off the direct route to Esher. We also cannot know for sure which route Austen might have taken from Kingston to visit her brother in London (it is possible to go via Brixton or Balham; both routes seem equally good). It is however possible by placing a piece of string on ordnance survey maps of the roads at that time to carefully measure out the distance in miles from the Bear public house in the centre of Esher to Brunswick Square in London, and this comes to exactly sixteen and a half miles. However, if the fictitious Hartfield House was a half a mile to the north rather than the south of Esher—in the direction of Kingston as it were—then this might well be about sixteen miles to Brunswick Square. Alternatively, when Austen says 16 miles, she might well have meant 16 and a half. A mile stone on the estate at Claremont, about a half a mile to the south of Esher, gives the distance from the estate as seventeen and three quarter miles to Westminster Bridge in London (and therefore about half a mile less than this from Esher itself) and it may well have been this that Austen had in mind when she said the distance from Hartfield house to Brunswick Square was sixteen miles. As the crow flies, a line of seven miles long from Box Hill passes directly through Claremont Park

and is therefore about a mile short of Esher / Highbury from where Emma and her party are supposed to set off, while a line drawn by road passes through Esher Common, to the south east of Claremont Park, but not through the town of Esher itself.

If I am right in what I say here then how is it possible that such a distinguished Jane Austen scholar as R. W. Chapman made such a mistake about the possible location of Highbury / Donwell as to have misled Austen scholarship as it seems even to the present day? It seems likely that Chapman's mistake had something to do with the point I have already mentioned: that he badly underrated the importance of the fact that Austen gives us a very precise location indeed for the home of Mr and Mrs John Knightley in London. Had Austen simply told us that Mr and Mrs Knightley lived somewhere in London, but not precisely where this was, we would have had nothing to go on in drawing our third line in order to intersect the first two. We would have been able to tell that a line drawn seven miles in a northerly direction from Box Hill in Surrey intersected at *two* places with a line drawn nine miles in a southerly direction from Richmond, but we would not have been able to say, on this evidence alone, which of these two places was the probable location of Donwell / Highbury. However a third line makes the matter conclusive. Assuming that Austen did have some actual place in mind for Donwell Abbey—and this might not be so of course, but let us say for the moment she did—and that the distances given are reasonably accurate, then this can *only* be Claremont House and therefore, by extension, Highbury must be Esher.

The strong impression given in *Emma* is that Austen did indeed have some actual place in mind for the setting of the novel, and this of course is one of the things that give the novel its very great authenticity. What is more common sense supports this argument. Why would any novelist invent an imaginary place, in all its detail,

when she could describe an actual place she already had in mind? It seems much more likely that she did have an actual place in mind when she wrote the novel than that she did not. Nor can it seriously be suggested that Austen was trying to *disguise* the actual location she had in mind in order to protect the identity of any actual people living in Esher or Claremont House at the time she published *Emma* since, if this were the case, why would she give an exact location for Mr and Mrs John Knightley's home in London? Didn't people living in Brunswick Square in 1816 deserve the same consideration as those living in Esher at the same time? And, for that matter, didn't people living in Gracechurch Street in London—mocked and ridiculed as a respectable address in *Pride and Prejudice*—deserve the same consideration as those living in Harpenden / Meryton at this time (Smith, 2006)? Rather, I think it is quite clear that Austen is playing with her readers here. This is another example of her wicked sense of humour. Those of her readers 'in the know'—her sister Casandra certainly, her brothers in the navy, and perhaps even the Prince Regent too [see below]—were *meant* to see through the clues and recognise places they all knew well in Esher and Claremont Park, while the rest of us were left to work this out for ourselves.ⁱⁱ

III.

However, if the geographical location of Richmond and London alone and the method of triangulation are not enough to persuade the sceptical reader that Donwell Abbey is indeed Claremont Park and Esher is Highbury—and after all, as I have just pointed out, some point *must* coincide with each of these three points providing only that all three lines are long enough to intersect—we have something more to go on in identifying Claremont Park in Surrey as the probable location of Donwell Abbey in *Emma*. In the novel *Emma*, the house and grounds of Donwell Abbey are described in

great detail in chapter 42 (4-6) and this provides us with an opportunity to test the thesis that Claremont Park is indeed Donwell Abbey by comparing Austen's description of Donwell Abbey in the novel to the house and grounds of Claremont Park that still exist today. Normally, even in England, it is unlikely that a house built more than three hundred years ago would still survive today, and in fact the original Claremont House (see Fig.1 below) was knocked down in 1769, and therefore just a few years before Austen herself was born, and rebuilt on a much grander Palladian scale, and in a more elevated position, than the original house on the road from Hampshire to London. But in fact, for reasons that I will explain in a moment, the 'new' Claremont House is such an important building in English history—it was once owned by the Royal family—that a great deal is known about its history, while the gardens of the former house are now owned by the National Trust (a quasi-government organisation charged with preserving old buildings of national or historical importance) and have been restored as far as possible to their former condition in the 18th century. It is therefore not only possible, but in fact relatively easy—the grounds of Claremont Park being open to the public—to compare the description of the house and grounds of Donwell Abbey given by Austen in *Emma* to that of the surviving garden and what is known of the former Claremont House today.

This is how Austen describes 'Donwell Abbey' in *Emma*.

[T]he respectable size and style of the building, its suitable, becoming, characteristic situation, low and sheltered, its ample gardens stretching down to meadows washed by a stream, of which the Abbey, with all the old neglect of prospect, had scarcely a sight—and its abundance of timber in rows and avenues, which neither fashion nor extravagance had rooted up (Ch.42: 4)

Now although this description might well be said to be that of any number of large country houses of Austen's time, the fact of the matter is that this does describe *remarkably* well the situation and the appearance of the *former* Claremont House shown in Figure 1. This house was at the foot of the slope of a hill with, as Austen says, 'all the old neglect of prospect' of houses of an earlier period and, as we can see, with an abundance of timber growing round it. Austen then goes on to say that:

[T]he house was larger than Hartfield, and totally unlike it, covering a good deal of ground, rambling and irregular, with many comfortable, and one or two handsome rooms. It was just what it ought to be, and it looked what it was; and Emma felt an increasing respect for it, as the residence of a family of such true gentility, untainted in blood and understanding.

Describing a walk in the gardens of the house Austen then has this to say:

[T]hey insensibly followed one another to the delicious shade of a broad short avenue of limes, which, stretching beyond the garden at an equal distance from the river, seemed the finish of the pleasure ground. It led to nothing; nothing but a view of the end over a low stone wall with high pillars, which seemed intended, in their erection, to give the appearance of an approach to the house, which never had been there. Disputable, however, as might be the taste of such a termination, it was a charming walk, and the view which closed it extremely pretty. The considerable slope, at nearly the foot of which the Abbey stood, gradually acquired a steeper form beyond its grounds; and at half a mile distant was a bank, of considerable abruptness and grandeur, well clothed with wood; and at the bottom of this bank, favourably placed and sheltered, rose the Abbey

Mill farm, with meadows in front, and the river making a close and handsome curve around it (Ch.42: 4/5).

In the garden of the former Claremont House today, there is just such a 'lime walk' (in fact an avenue of what we would now call 'line' or linden trees) and this lime walk ends abruptly in a low stone wall with a view over the surrounding garden and countryside (see fig.2) which, in the 18th century, might just have allowed one to see the bend in the nearby River Mole (see Map 2) and the plain of a meadow in front of what was then known as Winter Farm surrounded on three sides by the river, although today, because the position of the London to Portsmouth Road was moved to enhance the Claremont estate, and new trees planted to screen the estate from the road, it is no longer possible to see Winter farm from the location that Austen describes. On the very next page (Ch.42: 6) there is yet further detail given when we are told that after a cold meal inside the house, the Donwell Abbey party would go outside once more, to look at 'the old Abbey fish ponds' and 'perhaps get as far as the clover which was to begun cutting on the morrow', and it is a relatively easy matter today to discover that there were just such 'fish ponds' on the estate at that time and to determine that a large part of the estate not used as a park was worked as a farm.

It is therefore a relatively easy matter to match the description of Mr Knightley's house given by Austen in *Emma* to the picture of the former Claremont House and grounds that still survive today (see the maps I have provided to accompany this essay) and to imagine Abbey Mill Farm, the home of Mr Robert Martin, in the bend of the River Mole as shown in the plan or to picture Emma (or even Jane Austen herself?) standing at the low stone wall which still exists at the end of the lime walk admiring the view of the considerable slope leading down towards the fish pond and the surrounding park on the Claremont estate today.

We might also consider why Austen describes Donwell Abbey in quite so much detail in *Emma*? No such detailed description is given of Hartfield House or the scene from Box Hill, for example. Of course she is trying to build up Mr Knightley character, whom Emma is going to marry and whose status is reflected in his home. One is reminded here of Elisabeth Bennett's description of Pemberley in *Pride and Prejudice*, which she says jokingly was what first attracted her to Mr Darcy, or the even more detailed description of Sotherton in *Mansfield Park* together with much disapproving criticism of old houses being knocked down and gardens being 'improved' in line with fashion and extravagance. Mr Knightley, we can be quite sure, would never have knocked down the perfectly adequate Donwell Abbey just to rebuild this in a more elevated position—he is far too conservative, if not to say boring, to do any such thing—and he certainly would never have built this on the top of a hill and overlooking the main road to London in the location of the current Claremont House. But, as if this were not enough, and even more compellingly, we know that Austen knew Claremont Park well herself, and actually took a personal interest in its fate, because she refers to the house *by name* in one of the few surviving letters to her sister Cassandra. Written in February 1813, this is what she has to say:

From a Mr Spicer's grounds at Esher, which we walked into before our dinner, the views were beautiful. I cannot say what we did *not* see, but I should think that there could not be a wood or a meadow, or palace, or a remarkable spot in England that was not spread out before us on one side or the other. Claremont is going to be sold: a Mr Ellis has it now. It is a house that seems never to have prospered... after dinner we walked forward to be overtaken at the coachman's time, and before he did over take us we were very near Kingston (Austen-Leigh, 1913: 266).

Although this is the only reference that Austen makes to Claremont in her surviving letters, this fragment is enough to show that Jane and Casandra had spoken about the house before the letter was written and that it therefore must have been of some importance to them. This letter also shows that Austen was familiar with Esher as well, as of course she must have been on her many trips from Hampshire to London and in fact the ‘Mr Spicer’ to whom she refers in this letter was none other than the Steward of the Claremont Estate in 1813, and was employed by the then owner Charles Rose Ellis—later Baron Seaford—to manage the estate from 1802 to 1816.

Why were Jane and Casandra quite so interested in the fate of Claremont House? Apart from the fact that Jane’s comments in *Mansfield Park* suggest that she disapproved of old houses being knocked down and rebuilt simply for the sake of fashion and elegance, there was also a family connection. Claremont was at one time the property of the notorious British civil servant Robert Clive (known to this day in Britain as ‘Clive of India’) who later became Baron Clive of Plassey, after his success at the battle of Plassey in 1757 secured British colonial domination of India for the next 200 years. It was Clive who bought the former Claremont House and had this knocked down, but because he died in 1874, he never lived to see the new house he had commissioned built on the site, although his heirs continued to own the estate until 1786. It is therefore perhaps this that Austen refers to when she says that the house had ‘never prospered’ (it would have been better for the district of Esher if such a wealthy man had kept the house on). Clive was also known to Warren Hastings (1732-1818), later Governor of India, who, according to Clare Tomalin, was almost certainly the father of Jane and Casandra’s cousin Eliza, the daughter of their aunt Philadelphia (Tomalin, 1999: 18-21). Philadelphia had travelled to India to find a suitable marriage partner, and eventually married a much older man than herself, but seems despite this

to have had a long-standing affair with the much younger Hastings. It is possible then that the Austen family's interest in India, and especially in Warren Hastings, might have extended to the former home of Lord Clive of India?

There is yet another connection between Austen and the house, but this one is even more tentative. As is well known, *Emma* is dedicated to the then Prince Regent (the future King George IV of England, who as prince, reigned during the insanity of his father George III from 1811-20). Normally the dedication of the novel to the prince is explained as being an honour for Austen. The prince is said to have been an admirer of Austen's work and in November 1815 she was invited to Carlton House in London to meet the prince's Librarian, James Stanier Clarke, who suggested that she might dedicate the book to the prince and even suggested a story line to Austen for a future novel about himself (Stafford, 1996: 397). But if this is just a coincidence, it is still a very curious fact that it was the Prince Regent who bought Claremont House from the above named Mr Ellis in 1816—the same year in which *Emma* was published—as a marriage present for his only daughter, Princess Charlotte, on the occasion of Charlotte's wedding to Leopold, the future king of Belgium. It is possible therefore that *Emma* is dedicated to the Prince Regent, not just as a compliment to the King or because the King was a known admirer of her work, but *also* because this particular novel was by chance set at Claremont Park and was *then* dedicated to the prince when it became known that he was to buy the house?

Finally, there is yet another reason for thinking that Claremont might well be Donwell Abbey and Highbury must therefore be Esher. It is a further curious fact—curiouser and curiouser as we might say—that there is a picture of a group of gypsies included in the National Trust account of the history of Claremont House that was drawn by Queen Victoria in 1836 when, as a young girl, the future queen of England

was staying at Claremont House and which is described in the National Trust pamphlet as a drawing of ‘the Claremont gypsies’ (see Fig.3). Although nothing more is said about these gypsies in the pamphlet, the way they are described ‘as the Claremont gypsies’ suggests that the group living on the Claremont Park estate in 1836 had been doing so for some time; it is therefore possible that it was the ancestors of this same group of gypsies who gave Austen the idea for the otherwise most unusual scene in *Emma* in which Frank Churchill rescues Harriet Smith from being attacked by gypsies while they are walking from Donwell to Highbury. Princess Charlotte also died at Claremont House while giving birth to her first child in November 1817, and hence just three months after Austen herself, and it is worth noting that the future Queen Victoria would not have become Queen—and we would not speak of the ‘Victorian Age’—had Charlotte lived

IV.

If Claremont is Donwell then is it possible to identify any actual place in nearby Esher with Hartfield house, the home of Emma and her father Mr Woodhouse? Here things are much more difficult since we are told so little about Hartfield in the novel other than that it is in a separate parish to Donwell and that Highbury is ‘a large and prosperous village amounting to a town, to which Hartfield, in spite of its separate lawn and shrubberies and name, did really belong’ (Ch.1: 3). However if Esher is Highbury it is possible that Hartfield might well be a house now called Esher Place, a short distance from the centre of Esher and on the other side of the London to Portsmouth road from Claremont, the home of Mr Spicer as mentioned in Austen’s letter. At one time Esher Place was owned by one Henry Pelham, who was the younger brother of Baron Thomas Pelham-Holles, the Earl of Clare, and owner of

Claremont House from 1714-1769. Claremont Park, and therefore the small hill in Surrey on which Claremont house was built, was named by Pelham-Holles after his estates in County Clare in Ireland (hence Clare-mont). Pelham-Holles was twice prime minister of Britain and was made the Duke of Newcastle for the part he played in 1714 in inviting the Hanovarian Saxe-Coburg family—the family of the future Queen Victoria and the present Queen of England—to become the monarchs of England at that time. The Prince Regent, the future George IV, therefore owed his title in large part to Pelham-Holles influence. The Duke of Newcastle was an exceptionally wealthy man who owned estates in eleven counties in England and had an income of about £30,000 per year at a time when a lawyer or army officer could live well on a salary of £200 per year (National Trust, 2000: 25) but, perhaps because of its close proximity to London and Westminster, it seems that Claremont Park was his favourite home. It is important to remember that Austen cannot actually have seen the original Claremont House in which Newcastle lived in, and which had originally been built and then extended by the architect Sir John Vanbrugh—the house which I claim is the one that is actually described in the novel—but it seems likely that she saw drawings of the original house (the same drawings which in fact survive to this day and which I have reproduced in this essay) when she visited the estate in 1813. It also seems clear enough that she disapproved strongly of the behaviour of the *nouveau riche* Lord Clive of India (who in an infamous statement in Parliament had been forced to defend his good name against money-making schemes in India) in knocking down a perfectly good country house—a house that as Austen says ‘was just what it ought to be, and it looked what it was...the residence of a family of such true gentility, untainted in blood and understanding’ (Ch.42: 5)—to replace it with one designed in the newly fashionable Palladian style that we see on the top of a hill today. When Austen

describes Mr Knightly then she perhaps had in mind the young Pelham-Holles of 1714 and this suggest that Pelham-Holles wife, the Duchess of Newcastle, is a possible model for Emma.

Conclusion

We have three and perhaps four very good reasons to identify the location of Claremont Park with Donwell Abbey and therefore of Esher with Highbury in *Emma*. The first is geographical and concerns not only the triangulation of the distances given by Austen in the novel, but also the fact that Claremont and Esher are on the direct London to Portsmouth Road that Austen would have taken and knew so well when she travelled from her home in Chawton in Hampshire to London. The second concerns the description of Claremont House and the gardens of the house itself. The description of the house might not have been conclusive by itself (many houses in the 17th century might have looked like the former Claremont House) but the description of the pleasure grounds and the relation of Claremont Estate to a pronounced bend in the River Mole at just this point creating a plane suitable for farming seems to me to be compelling. Anyone who stands at the low wall at the end of the 'lime walk' overlooking what Austen describes as the fish ponds (an artificial boating lake stocked with fish for the purposes of sport but also food) and looking down across the park cannot help but think that they are standing on the exact spot described by Austen in *Emma*. The third piece of evidence has to do with Austen's family acquaintance with the distinguished Indian civil servant Warren Hastings (and hence a natural interest in the affairs of the even more infamous Clive of India) and their familiarity with Claremont House and with Esher. While the fourth and much less sure piece of information concerns the dedication of the novel to the future king of England and

subsequent owner of Claremont House. Since Austen did not describe the house and grounds of Claremont Park that existed in her own day this suggests that she was reflecting back to a period some fifty or more years before she lived to the house and grounds that existed on this site before she was born. If I am right in what I say here then it is not the England of 1816 that Austen is describing in the novel *Emma*, but rather—as romantic novelists of a conservative disposition are inclined to do—a longed for and lost golden age (as she supposes) of England sometime before 1765.

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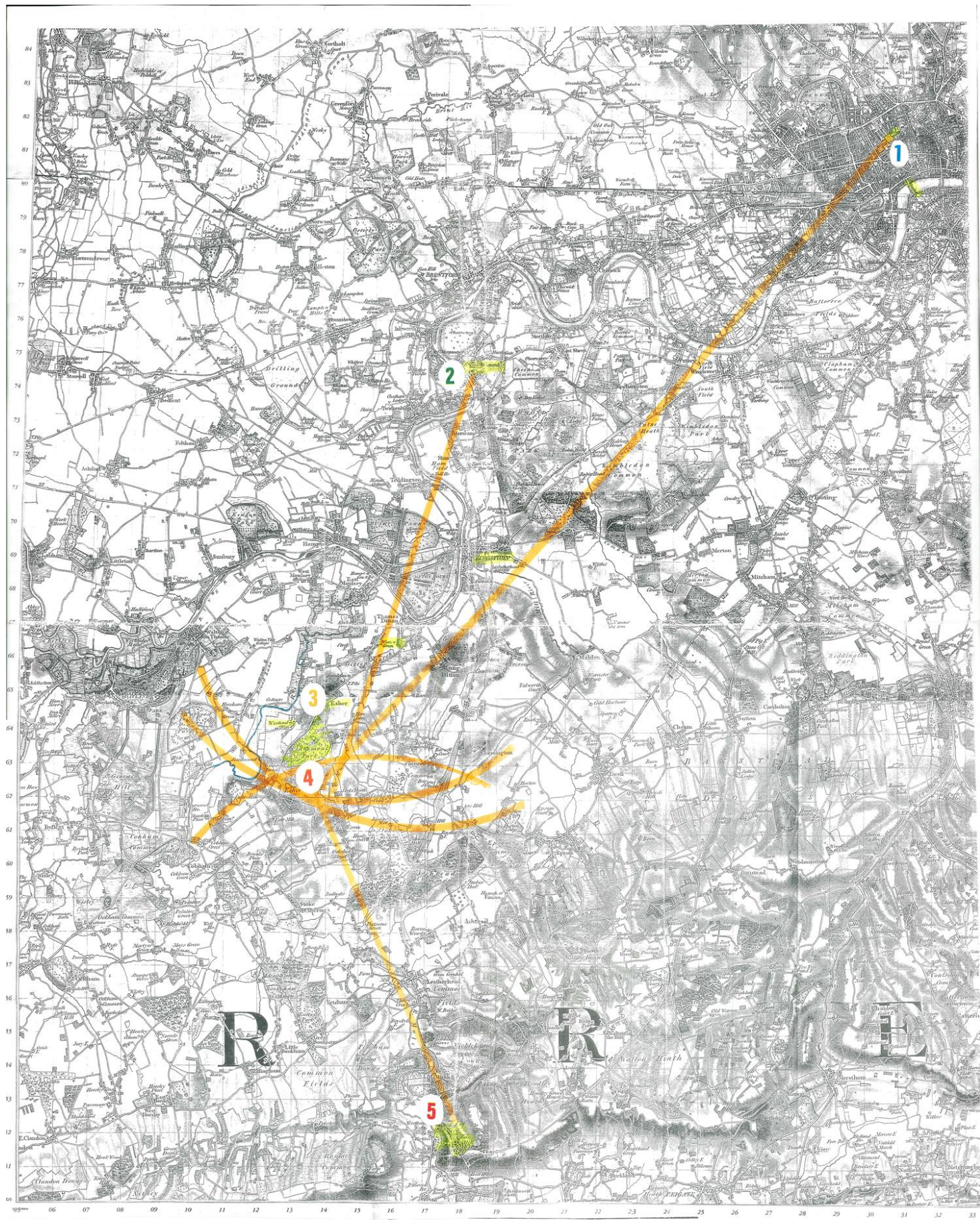
End Notes.

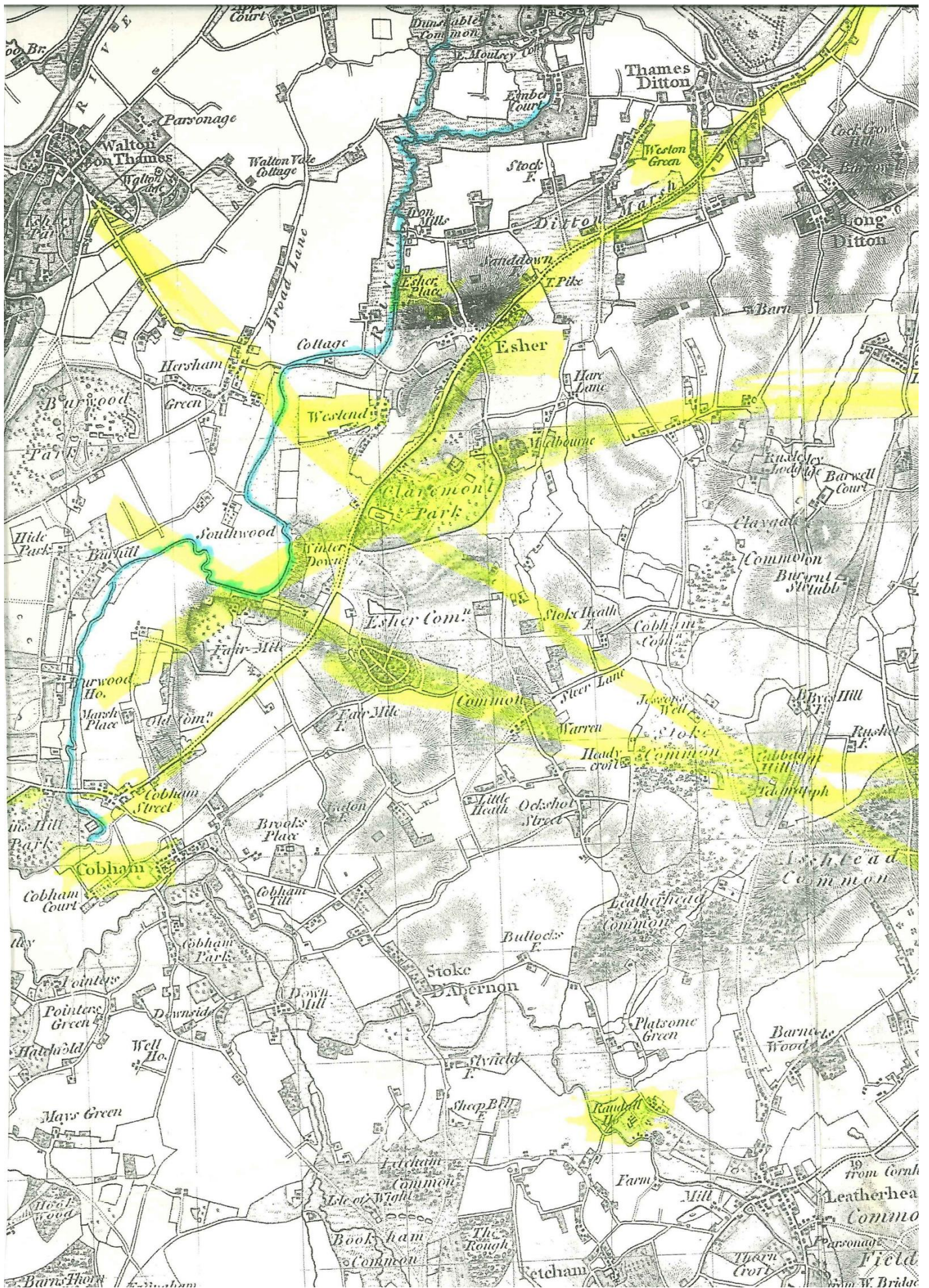
ⁱ There are in fact (see Map 1) only two places in Surrey where the arcs of these two lines cross. One is a place called Esher Common just to the south of Claremont Park and the other is a piece of common land called 'Princes Coverts', just to the east of Oxshott in the county of Surrey. A 'covert' is an archaic name for a thicket of woodland providing shelter for 'game'—i.e., animals--especially birds, for hunting, in this case no doubt by a 'prince'. Once upon a time then, but not by Austen's day, these would probably have been royal hunting grounds.

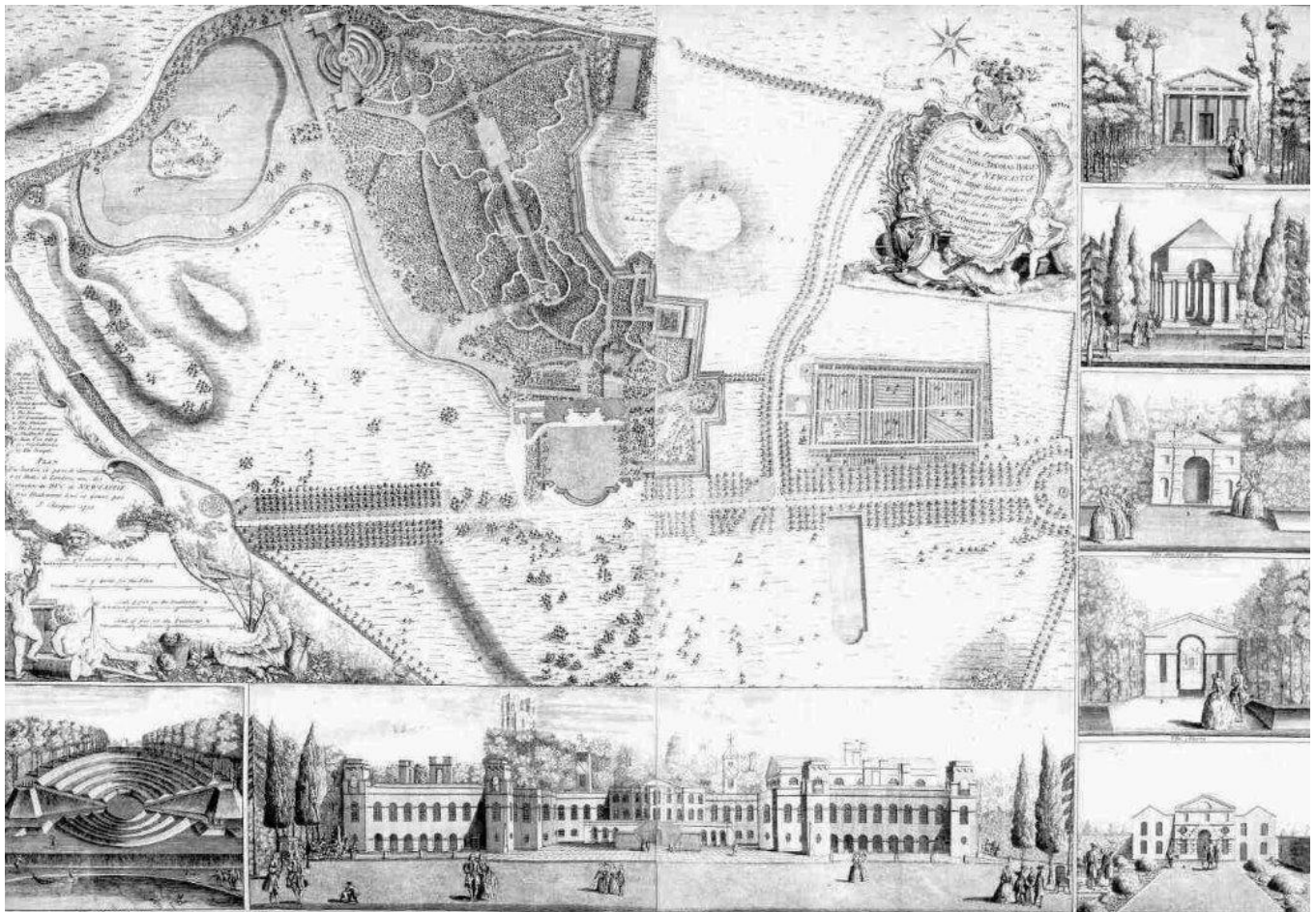
ⁱⁱ There are any number of other reasons for locating Donwell Abbey as Claremont Park and Highbury as Esher. Mr Martin, the farmer who rents land from Mr Knightley and who proposes to Harriet Smith, seems to travel to the [nearby?] Kingston on Thames on a regular basis. Why go to Kingston—which is about six miles north of Esher—if there was another nearer market town to go to nearer by? The only other principle town of any size nearer to Esher than Kingston is Cobham, to the southwest of Claremont, and this is also mentioned by Austen in the novel when Mr Knightley writes to his sister in law in London to reassure her that the fever in Cobham has not yet spread to Donwell. Donwell / Esher then must be somewhere fairly near to both Kingston / Cobham and Claremont / Esher are more or less exactly mid-way between these two towns. Mrs Taylor, Emma's former Governess (recently married to Mr Weston) lives in a small house which seems to be on the other side of Highbury from Donwell (Ch. 2: 1). The house is called Randalls (Ch.3: 1) and is said to be three-quarters of a mile from Hartfield (Ch.15: 3). It is possible then to walk from Randalls to Highbury, of which Hartfield House, the Woodhouse's home, is part (Ch.24:1). Mr Weston returns to his own home, Randalls, after a day in London on business and then walks half a mile from his own home to Hartfield (Ch.35:3). It is possible then that one comes to first to Randalls and then goes on to Hartfield having once passed through Highbury? Mr Frank Churchill gives this sequence himself on his first visit to Emma after coming from Randalls: '[he] admired the situation [of Randalls] the walk to Highbury, Highbury itself, [and] Hartfield still more' (Ch.23:3). However it is also possible that Mr Weston and Frank Churchill go to Randalls first because it is their home and then go on to visit other people later in Highbury. But it is a curious coincidence—yet another coincidence then!--that there is an actual place just north of Esher on the road from Esher towards Kingston-upon-Thames (the road which Austen describes to Casandra in her letter of 1813) called 'Weston Green' although this actual place is perhaps just a bit too far to walk from Esher and perhaps even farther than Austen describes herself walking in that direction in her letter to her sister.

Images for The Probable Location of ‘Donwell Abbey’ in Jane Austen’s *Emma*.

Maps 1 and 2 are in order as given here and Figures 1 to 3 are the same. If you look at Figure 2, the map of the grounds of Claremont Park, it is possible to make out the mouth shaped wall at the front of the former Claremont House as shown in Figure 1, with the walk through the grounds shown behind this. Figure 2 also shows three examples of the kind of gate house that Austen describes in *Emma* which were located around the gardens of the estate and gave the misleading impression that one had returned to the main house when in fact this was not the case. Finally in the bottom right hand corner of Figure 2 there is a depiction of a substantial farm house which might for all we know be the picture that Austen had in mind when she was describing Robert Martin’s Abbey Mill farm in the bend of the River Mole at this point (see Map 2). See also Map 2 for the place name Weston Green on the London Road to the north west of Esher.







A childhood drawing of the Claremont gypsies by Queen Victoria, who recorded the names of the children: Dinah, Job, Britannia, Emmeline and Helen (Royal Collection)

ROYAL CLAREMONT

