

Regency Period

(came after the Georgian period and before the Victorian period)

Location – Regency period refers to a period of time in England – but was copied in overseas English colonies (such as Australia).

The Regency Period was a period of time between 1811-1820 when **George III** (1738 -1820) (Georgian period) was considered unfit to rule the country and a Regent was put on the throne to rule until his son (later George IV 1762-1830) became King. Often the term 'The Regency Period' is more loosely referred to as the years between 1795 – 1837. The Regency Period was characterized by a period of excesses by the aristocracy and for the Napoleonic Wars.

Class System - The class system was rigidly upheld during the Regency Period. The old class landowners, the Church and the Royals defined and directed life in a society where there were **huge disparities between rich and poor**.



King George III

Peerage – Until 1999, all **Peers (Lords)** could sit in the House of Lords. Peeresses only received this right in 1963. Peers were directly under Royalty (King, Prince). The order of peerage currently in England is (in successive order) – Duke, Marquess, Earl, Viscount & Baron. Peerage goes through the eldest male heir – and if no sons then it goes to the nearest male relative. Some titles can go to a female heir and a father could petition the King or Queen to pass down title and property to the eldest heir if it is female – however this is rare. Correct title for Peers include – 'Your Grace' for a Duke/Duchess, 'My Lord' 'My Lady' for a Marquess/Marchioness, Earl/Countess and Viscount/Viscountess and 'Sir' 'My Lady' for a Baron/Baroness. When a peer dies, his title passes on to his nearest male relative and his wife received the title of 'Dowager Duchess/Marchioness/Countess/Viscountess/Baroness' and usually moves to a smaller house on the property entitled the 'Dowager Cottage' especially built for that purpose.

Entailed property often accompanied peerage. Entailed property means land and houses that are attached to the title and therefore only the male heir can inherit. Entailed property cannot be sold and in the event of a family line dying out, it goes back to the reigning Monarch. Entailed property is not only attached to peerage. Gentlemen landowners often had entailed property that could only be passed down to the eldest male heir (ie in Jane Austen's 'Pride and Prejudice' – none of Mr Bennett's five daughters can inherit his property and upon his death all will go to his nearest male relative – Mr Collins)

Regency architecture – follows much of the style of the previous **Georgian period** with a focus on classical elegance. The buildings were often completed with white stucco facades with usually majestic entranceways with large Grecian columns. Regency buildings were usually built as terraces or crescents with elegant wrought iron balconies. **John Nash** was a famous architect of the time.



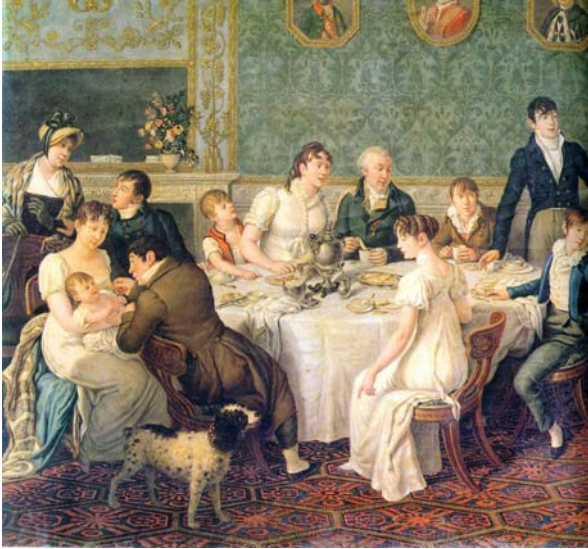
Regent's Park, London

for some good examples of Regency architectural style – look up on Google images

Regency furnishings – were characterised by elegant furnishings influenced by **Grecian/Roman styles** as well as **natural images**. Popular wallpaper consisted of vertical stripes or patterns. Pastel colours were most popular.

for some good examples of Regency furniture/art styles -

http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/british_galleries/bg_styles/Style05b/index.html



Regency Fashion – saw the final triumph of informal dress over the formal overdone styles of the 18th century with elaborate dresses, corsets and petticoats etc.

Woman's fashions followed classical ideals (**Neoclassical styles** - Grecian or Roman dress) with tightly laced corsets being replaced by the high-waisted, more natural figures.

Women would often wear different coloured clothes for home, dining, riding etc. Materials were usually white muslin, or pale colours and usually devoid of patterns.

Hairstyles also became more natural looking with curls over the face and down the back (although sometimes it took quite a while to achieve the 'natural' look). Women no longer

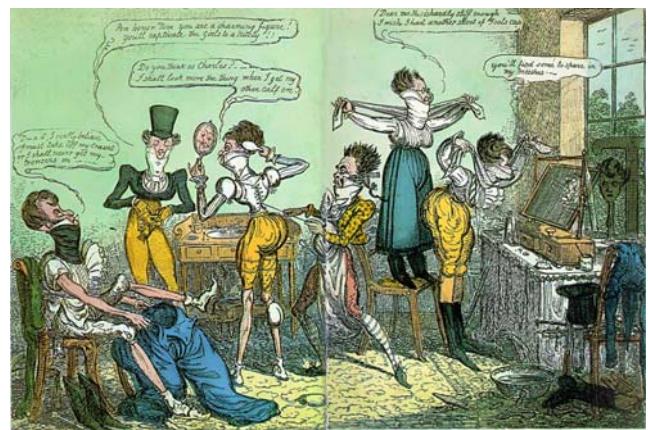
wore wigs or powdered their hair in attempt to have elaborate hairstyles. Conservative women still continued to wear **mob caps**. No respectable women would leave the house without a hat or bonnet. Underclothes consisted of a chemise and short stays (a short loose corset) as well as a thin petticoat. Drawers tied around the waist were begun to be worn in this period as well as stockings held up by garters.

Gloves were always worn outside but could be worn inside during a ball or a social call. They were always removed for dining. Reticules were small material bags often hung from one wrist which served the purpose of a modern handbag. Parasols (like a modern day umbrella but made from material) were carried around to protect the lady from the sun and decorated fans were also seen as an important fashion accessory.

Men's fashions followed much of the changes of women's fashion – with men no longer wearing frilly shirts, donning lace, embroidery or wearing corsets. Breeches became longer and straighter – resembling modern day trousers. Breeches would finish just past the knee (at the boot top level) or extend down to the ankles. Coats were cut-away at the front and were long at the back with standing collars.

Shirts were often of plain white material and had tall standing collars. Men often wore waistcoats which were highwaisted and tight to the body. Men wore knee high hessian boots (from Hesse in Germany).

"The Dandy" – was slang for a **fop** (fribble, popinjay, fashion-monger, clotheshorse), a person who overdresses and puts on airs – always a title given to a man. **Beau Brummell** was a person who made Dandy fashion fashionable in the Regency period – and men that wanted to be considered fashionable made efforts to follow the fashion trends that Brummell set.



Caricatures of Dandy's getting dressed

Regency Entertainment – Dance was a favourite pastime of people during the Regency period. Dances were often performed in a Quadrille style (formation of four). And dancing involved very little interaction between males and females. The most popular dance was the cotillion – an English country dance. The Waltz was introduced to England (from Bavaria – Germany) during the early 1800s but was considered quite a scandalous dance and many balls would not allow it.

Dancing was most commonly done at Balls or in public houses like Almacks.

Many clubs were male only clubs such as White's where men (mostly gentleman) would go to socialise with other men, read the paper, gamble, drink and have a meal.

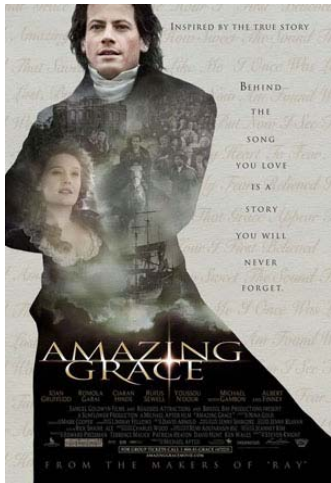
Another common pastime was an evening at the theatre watching plays or opera.

The lower classes had much less time to socialise and enjoy life – but they also enjoyed going to the theatre, street performances and the pub.

<http://www.bfv.com/regency/> Description of popular Regency dances

<http://homepages.ihug.co.nz/~awoodley/regency/club.html> London clubs

<http://www.georgianindex.net/Theater/Theater.html> An evening at the theatre



Regency Society - there is a tendency to see the Regency period as a time of elegance and constant balls. Whilst some people of the upper class lived almost frozen in time with their heads in a metaphorical bubble, there were great changes happening.

Across the English channel the **French Revolution** had only happened in 1789 and England was fighting **Napoleon** during the whole Regency Period (**the Napoleonic Wars**).

There were **movements of women against the social restrictions of their time** and in many cases this is the birth of the women's liberation movement.

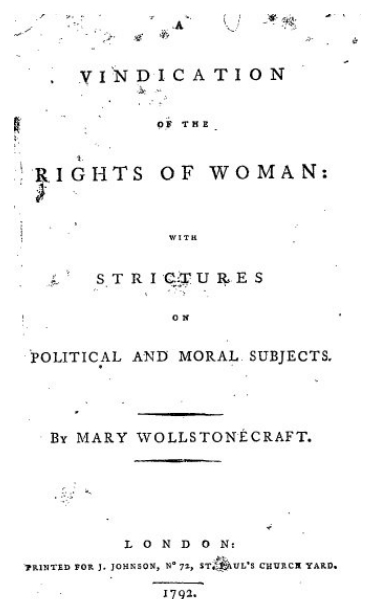
There were also **movements against slavery**, led by the very famous William Wilberforce, who thanks to his tireless efforts and others like him, the British Empire abolished slavery in 1807 (achieved royal assent – royal stamp of approval). He was also a tireless social reformer in other areas such as rights for the poor and women. The 2006 film *Amazing Grace* is based on his life and I strongly urge you to watch it.

<http://www.apple.com/trailers/independent/amazinggrace/>

Women's Rights – "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife. However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters."

Above are the opening lines of Jane Austen's 'Pride and Prejudice' opening up Austen's satirical commentary of women's roles within Regency England. Women were meant to be only concerned with issues to do with marriage and childbirth as well as the gentler arts but many women were interested in more things than this. This meant that Regency period was characterised by tensions between the sexes.

A very influential text of the time was **Mary Wollstonecraft's text 'A Vindication of the Rights of Women' (1792)** in which she did not directly state men and women are equal but her text does call for equality between men and women in various aspects of society such as marriage, morality and economic considerations.



Politics – On the one hand the Regency period was a time of conservatism and on the other there were bold movements for social reform. These tensions within society often show up in the literature and poetry of the day. There was a constant struggle to be independent and an individual in a society that preached conformity and rigid social structures.

Whigs and Tories – politics in England during this time was divided into two camps:

- ✧ **the Whigs** – who believed that the politicians were put in place to rule for the people and were answerable to the people
- ✧ **the Tories** – believed in the divine right of the King to rule as well as the Lords.

Parliament (which was controlled by the King to a certain extent) was divided into the House of Lords (male peers) and the House of Commons which were often landed gentry or wealthy people in society. Entry to the House of Commons was guaranteed by patronage by Lords in the area. Once this was decided there was limited franchise (voting) by males but only those who owned land and were over the age of 21.

Prime Ministers in the Regency Period

William Pitt	1783-1801, 1804-1806
Henry Addington	1801-04
Lord Grenville	1806-1807
Duke of Portland	1807-1809
Spencer Perceval	1809-1812
Lord Liverpool	1812-1827
George Canning	1827
Viscount Goderich	1827-28
Duke of Wellington	1828-1830
Earl Grey	1830-1834
Lord Melbourne	1834, 1835-1841
Sir Robert Peel	1834-1835, 1841-1846

For further information: <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/pm.htm>

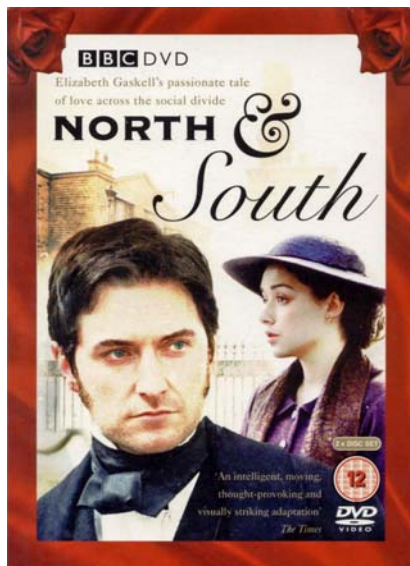
In the Regency period there was a **growing Middle Class** (factory and business owners) who were increasing in number and demanding a role in the House of Commons. Generally the poor had no one looking out for them except well-meaning peers or Middle Class. Mostly Peers and Middle Classes did not support the causes of the poor because it would mean a loss of money and position for them.

Economy – The Regency Period was affected greatly by the **Industrial Revolution**.

The Industrial Revolution began in England in the latter part of the 1700s. This means that the means of production changes from mostly manual labour (people) to machinery (at this stage mostly controlled by steam).



Original Steam Engine in a museum in England



This had huge social repercussions on life in England. It meant that many people were put out of work. There was a huge movement from countryside to cities to look for work, also a rise in development of slums and poverty. There was no social security to protect these people out of work.

It also meant the growth of factories emitting pollution. By and large industry grew up in the North (cities like Manchester, Leeds and Liverpool) and the south (London) remained frozen in a much calmer period of time. A novel like 'North and South' by Elizabeth Gaskell – made into a BBC miniseries (2004) which I highly recommend you to watch.

You cannot look at the Regency period without taking into consideration the growing industrialisation, poverty, divisions between rich and poor and moves for social reform (as well as resulting growth in conservatism).

1802 Factory Act

1833 Factory Act

For a comprehensive understanding of the terrible conditions in Factory's and attempts to reform in you need to go to the excellent website -

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/IRchild.main.htm>

Gothic genre - literature and architecture with a gothic slant became popular in the Regency period (and has never lost its popularity since)

The Goths were an original Germanic tribe that hassled the Roman Empire and eventually brought down the Roman Empire.

Gothic art and architecture were popular during the Middle Ages but had a revival during the Regency period. Gothic architecture is featured by pointed arches and features prominently in the construction of castles, cathedrals, town halls and universities.

Gothic art, which was popular during the Middle Ages and mostly Christian, never really had a revival during the Regency period.

Gothic literature – incorporates both elements of horror and romance. Features of Gothic literature commonly include – supernatural elements, ghosts, haunted houses, gothic architecture, castles, darkness, decay, doubles, madness, secrets, hereditary curses. Gothic genre usually relies on archetypal characters ie the hero, the tyrant, the femme fatale, ghosts, the damsel in distress etc.

Romanticism – literary and artistic movement that arose in the Regency period. It was a reaction against the horrors of the industrial movement and a turning back to the glory and beauty of the English and Classical (Ancient Greece and Rome) past before Industrial Revolution. **Romanticist writing and art** exhibits a predominance of natural images and pastel colours. There was a focus in particular on the beauty of the literary or artistic form and Romanticist writers/artists were the superstars of their day, many choosing to live lives that defied social rules. Often they lived in artistic communities and broke many of the social rules and regulations. Many of the conservative elements of society on the one hand admired the Romantics and the other hand abhorred their style of living.



'The Wanderer Above the Mist'
Casper David Friedrich (1818)



'The Haywain' John Constable
(1821)

Famous romanticist writers include – Shelley, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats, Bronte.

Satire – was used commonly by many writers of the day. It is characterised by a combination of irony and sarcasm.

Regency Literature – reading was a popular pastime amongst the upper-classes and increasingly so amongst the lower-classes. Reading novels tended to mostly appeal to women and as such many of the storylines involved romance. (Men tended to more commonly read newspapers)

Famous writers included:

Jane Austen – 'Pride and Prejudice', 'Emma', 'Mansfield Park', 'Sense and Sensibility', 'Northanger Abbey' and 'Persuasion' – in addition she wrote a lot of juvenilia available on internet.

Sir Walter Scott – 'Ivanhoe', 'Rob Roy', 'The Lady of the Lake', 'The Heart of Midlothian', 'Waverley', 'The Bride of Lammermoor'.

Susan Ferrier – 'Marriage', 'The Inheritance', 'Destiny'

Maria Edgeworth – 'Letters for Literary Ladies', 'Castle Rackrent', 'Belinda', 'Leonora'

Horace Walpole – 'The Castle of Otranto' (written before Regency period – but incredibly popular during Regency)

Mary Shelley (daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft) – Frankenstein

Regency Poets (& the name of some of their more famous poems) - N.B. some of these poets are more in the Victorian era but they are considered Romantic poets because of the subject matter they wrote.

Percy Bysshe Shelley – 'Prometheus Unbound', 'Ode to the West Wind'

John Keats – 'Hyperion', 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', 'Ode to a Nightingale'

Alfred, Lord Tennyson – 'The Lady of Shalott', 'Ulysses'

Robert Browning – 'Porphyria's Lover', 'My Last Duchess'

Lord Byron – 'Don Juan'

Samuel Taylor Coleridge – 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', 'Kubla Khan', 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prisoner'

William Wordsworth – 'Lines Composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey', 'Strange Fits of Passion I have Known', 'I wandered lonely as a cloud'

William Blake – 'Songs of Innocence'

Napoleonic Wars (1802 – 1815) – The English wars with **Napoleon** formed the backdrop of this whole period. When reading novels at the time it would seem it was not very important but the reality was it was a huge, defining moment of the era that effected England immensely – socially, politically and economically.

Key Dates

1789 – **French Revolution** – when the people in France rose up against their monarchy and instituted a Republic. The King and Queen (Louis XIV and Marie Antoinette) were beheaded by the Guillotine.

1793-1794 – Reign of Terror – when many people (particularly aristocrats) were guillotined

1799 – **Napoleon** staged a coup d'état (pronounced coo deyta – means a takeover) and became Ruler of France.

1802 – 1815 – Napoleon invaded a lot of Europe and England was worried Napoleon would invade and take over in England as well.

1802 – Napoleon attacks Italy

1803 – Napoleon sells Louisiana (southern America) to the Americans as a way of raising money for war and also thwarting Spanish interests in America (Spain was the enemy of France during Napoleonic wars)

From this time onwards – Napoleon was fighting battles on many fronts. He fights a vicious battle with the Spanish and in 1812 has a disastrous invasion of Russia where most of his forces are wiped out. This period of time is characterised by many famous battles.

Two very famous ones that effected England were:

1805 – Naval battle of **Trafalgar** – **Admiral Nelson** won the battle being outnumbered by the French and losing no ships and hardly any men. The French forces lost approximately 85% of their forces. This battle ensured England's dominance of the seas right up until World War II.

1814 – Napoleon was captured and exiled to a small island in the Mediterranean called **Elba**. He managed to escape and rounded up his supporters again.

1815 – **Battle of Waterloo** (in Belgium) – Napoleon was soundly defeated by the British and her supporters, led by the **Duke of Wellington**.

1816 – Napoleon is exiled to a small inhospitable island in the Atlantic called **St Helena** where he died in 1821.



Famous people and places – for a comprehensive list – go to website address

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regency_period

Etiquette – The Regency period had very strict rules of social behaviour on what was acceptable and what was not. The lower classes were a bit more relaxed but still followed these very strong rules.

Education – men and women did not gain an equal education. Women were often educated at home where they learned the 'gentle arts' such as French, dancing, music, drawing, sewing and embroidery. If she had a very openminded father, then she may learn broader subjects such as reading the classics, keeping accounts etc.

Upper-class men – would be educated at home by a governess or tutor until about 8 or 9 years of age when they would usually go away to boarding school (famous schools like **Eton**, **Harrow** and **Winchester**). School was not compulsory at all. The majority of their curriculum consisted of learning in Ancient Greek and Latin, the famous classical texts of Ancient Greece and Rome. Studied authors included; **Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Herodotus, Thucydides, Aristophanes, Plato, Aristotle, Tacitus, Plutarch, Shakespeare** etc. Of course the **Bible** was studied as well (Protestant interpretation). After that they would attend **Oxford** or **Cambridge University** where they would continue their studies of the classics as well as maths, philosophy, law and modern history. In these universities, the young gentleman's futures were either set as men of parliament or men of science.

Lower-class men – usually had no education at all or a very rudimentary education in reading and writing, designed to prepare them for a career in trade.

Websites that you will find very useful on the Regency Period

<http://users.bathspa.ac.uk/greenwood/imagemap.html> map of London in 1827 – can click on squares and go in for a closer look

<http://www.austen.com/onreg.htm>

<http://www.janeausten.co.uk/magazine/section.ihtml?id=37&step=2>

<http://www.britainexpress.com/History/english-culture.htm> great site on some of the English cultural practices.

<http://www.janeausten.co.uk/magazine/section.ihtml?id=38&step=2> Regency advice

http://www.candicehern.com/regency_today.htm great site on Regency places then and now

<http://www.literary-liaisons.com/article046.htm> Servants also had a very strict hierarchy – you can read about it in this website

<http://www.janeausten.co.uk/magazine/page.ihtml?pid=364&step=4> The cost of living in Regency England

<http://hibiscus-sinensis.com/regency/weddingdress.htm> Regency white wedding dresses

<http://hibiscus-sinensis.com/regency/weddinggown.htm> Regency white wedding dresses

<http://www.janeausten.co.uk/magazine/page.ihtml?pid=423&step=4> Regency Wedding

<http://homepages.ihug.co.nz/~awoodley/regency/marry.html> Regency marriages

<http://www.janeausten.co.uk/magazine/page.ihtml?pid=244&step=4> Regency elopement

<http://hibiscus-sinensis.com/regency/shopping.htm> Regency Shopping

<http://hibiscus-sinensis.com/regency/shops.htm> Regency Shopping

<http://hibiscus-sinensis.com/regency/stores.htm> Regency shops

<http://hibiscus-sinensis.com/regency/shoppingmalls.htm> Regency shops

<http://hibiscus-sinensis.com/regency/money.htm> Regency Money

<http://www.janeausten.co.uk/magazine/page.ihtml?pid=605&step=4> Regency Toilets

<http://hibiscus-sinensis.com/regency/colors.htm> Regency colours

<http://hibiscus-sinensis.com/regency/skincare.htm> Regency skincare

<http://hibiscus-sinensis.com/regency/cosmetics.htm> Regency cosmetics

<http://www.austentation.com/Main%20Files/HTML/home.htm> Regency accessories

<http://www.printsgeorge.com/Fashion%206.htm> Regency Fashion

<http://www.printsgeorge.com/Fashion%207.htm> Regency Fashion

<http://www.printsgeorge.com/Fashion%208.htm> Regency Fashion

<http://homepages.ihug.co.nz/~awoodley/regency/tie.html> Regency Fashion

<http://homepages.ihug.co.nz/~awoodley/regency/dandy.html> Regency Fashion

<http://www.georgianindex.net/tailors/tailor.html> Regency Fashion

<http://www.thenonesuch.com/lexicon.html> Regency Dictionary

<http://www.fromoldbooks.org/Grose-VulgarTongue/> Regency Slang Dictionary

<http://homepages.ihug.co.nz/~awoodley/carriage/types.html> Regency Travel (Carriages)

<http://www.literary-liaisons.com/article033.html> Regency Travel

<http://www.janeausten.co.uk/magazine/page.ihtml?pid=296&step=4> Regency Travel – cabs

<http://www.janeausten.co.uk/magazine/page.ihtml?pid=305&step=4> Travel - ferries

<http://homepages.ihug.co.nz/~awoodley/carriage/inns.html> Regency Inns

<http://www.home.gil.com.au/~ears/regent.html> Regency post

<http://www.janeausten.co.uk/magazine/page.ihtml?pid=391&step=4> Regency lighting

<http://www.janeausten.co.uk/magazine/page.ihtml?pid=564&step=4> Regency childbirth

<http://homepages.ihug.co.nz/~awoodley/regency/warplan.html> Military ranks

<http://www.janeausten.co.uk/magazine/page.ihtml?pid=101&step=4> Military ranks

<http://www.kipar.org/piratical-resources/british-navy-ranks.html> Naval ranks

<http://www.kipar.org/piratical-resources/british-nautical-glossary.html> Nautical terms

<http://regency.getifa.com/sick.html> Regency diseases

<http://homepages.ihug.co.nz/~awoodley/regency/pain.html> Regency healthcare

<http://www.last-names.net/origincat.asp?origincat=British> British surnames

<http://www.regencylady.net/repository/>

<http://www.sff.net/people/didish/regency.htm>

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/industry.html>