

Publishing feature

# Folio Society

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# ENCHANTED BOOKSHELF BLOG



## Folio Society Feature

Folio Society has been transforming the way we read and collect books since 1947. Based in London, the publisher began with a vision of creating beautiful editions at a price within reach of everyday readers. Over the decades, Folio has become renowned for its craftsmanship, fine bindings and original illustrations. Each book is designed not only to be read, but to be treasured.

I have been slowly building my own Folio Society collection over the years, from out of print treasures like Andrew Lang's Rainbow Fairy Books to modern favourites such as Jurassic Park and The Lost World. Each title is crafted with an incredible attention to detail, from the bindings to the artwork and every volume feels like a keepsake.

To mark the 250th anniversary of Jane Austen's birth, The Folio Society has released a stunning new limited edition of *The Complete Novels*, restricted to just 750 copies worldwide. Each volume is bound in rich silk-and-cotton jacquard cloth, with intricate monograms, woodcut frontispieces, linocut illustrations and vignettes designed by Sarah Young, alongside a new foreword by historian and bestselling author Lucy Worsley and a gorgeous box by award-winning graphic designer Emily Benton.. This extraordinary set not only celebrates Austen's timeless storytelling but also reflects Folio's craftsmanship and dedication to preserving literary heritage.

In this feature, I share exclusive insights from the team behind the collection, offering a closer look at the artistry and decisions that brought this anniversary edition to life.

Kimberley Xx



# EB *Enchanted Bookshelf*

## Folio Society Feature

Kate Grimwade is Production Director at the Folio Society and has worked at Folio for over 26 years. Kate sees her role as setting the standard and striving for excellence in modern fine book production, working with designers and bookbinders to push the boundaries, using innovative design and cutting-edge production technology. Kate is passionate about embracing traditional craft bookbinding techniques and Folio's responsibility in supporting these artisan skills.

Photo ©Dunja\_Opalko



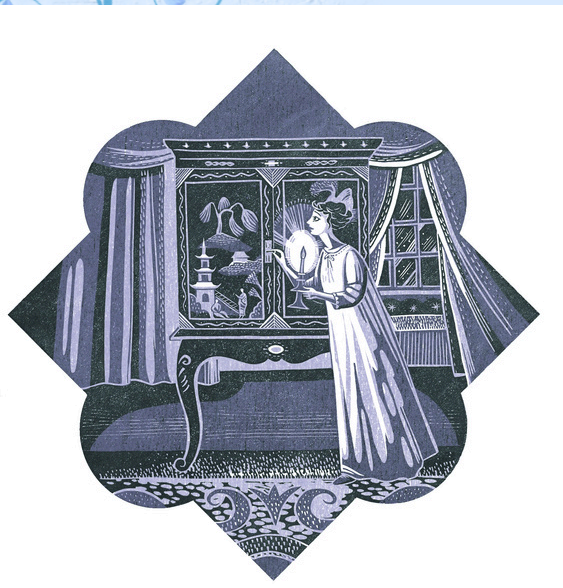
James Rose is Head of Editorial at the Folio Society and has been at Folio for over a decade. He has worked on both fiction and non-fiction titles and now heads the limited editions programme. He previously worked at Macmillan and Faber and Faber and is committed to independent publishing and creating beautiful books.

Emily Benton is an award-winning book designer based in Edinburgh, recognised for her tactile, minimalist approach to publication design, typesetting and print production. She holds an MA in Book Design from Reading University's internationally acclaimed Typography department and has developed her expertise through projects for leading cultural and publishing organisations. Her client portfolio includes Chanel, Boots, Edinburgh University Press, Macmillan Cancer Research, MIT, Saatchi Gallery and The Folio Society. Emily's work has been honoured by the New York Times Best Art Books and by the British Book Design & Production Awards. Alongside her studio practice, she lectures at Edinburgh Napier University.



# A conversation with James Rose

Head of Editorial at Folio Society



## **What inspired The Folio Society to celebrate Jane Austen's 250th anniversary with such a lavish edition?**

The 250th anniversary is a major celebration of a major English writer, and we knew we wanted to do something spectacular. As such, we decided on a special limited edition of all her key novels – I didn't much like the idea of picking a favourite! Her works are timeless, so we had to create an edition that would remain equally enduring, and we felt the best way of producing a version that would last for the next 250 years, would be as a limited edition.

## **How did you select which introduction writer would best honor Austen's legacy and why Lucy Worsley?**

Lucy is an historian, author and television presenter, and an expert on Georgian and Regency England. Her work championing Austen and her works is rightly famed, and she has delivered a wonderful Foreword that looks at the life and legacy of Austen. It really does pull the whole package together.

## **Was there a guiding editorial theme you wanted this collection to capture (e.g. romance, wit, timelessness)?**

We really wanted to make this an elegant, timeless edition that would indeed capture all the wit, romance and searing social analysis Austen brings in her novels. That's why the choice of introducer and artist were so key to this.

## **Austen has been reprinted many times, what did you want this edition to add to her story that hasn't been done before?**

Austen's works are constantly being re-evaluated and adapted. Each generation finds something to love in Austen and her enduring appeal lies in her deep understanding of human nature. Her ability to capture the struggles and joys, even the absurdities, of life ensure her relevance to this day. What I hoped this edition would do is show all those emotions and to marry the contemporary with the traditional, making this the defining edition.



# A conversation with James Rose

Head of Editorial at Folio Society

***What considerations go into choosing the right typeface and layout for a set like this, was it purely aesthetic or also a nod to historical printing?***

When we started on the project, the initial book team all went to the British Library to look at the original first editions of all six novels. It was a great treat, not only to see the books but also to handle them and examine them. We took detailed notes on their construction and layout, even the feel of the paper used, and all that plays into the creation of this edition.

***If you could have asked Jane Austen one editorial question while preparing this set, what would it have been?***

Ms. Austen, why are you so inconsistent with your spelling and punctuation? At least that is what I would have asked at first, but as you begin to read these first-edition texts you realize that every inconsistency simply adds to the charm of the novels. They bring us closer to the author.

***Was there a particular Austen passage or quote that you kept returning to during this project?***

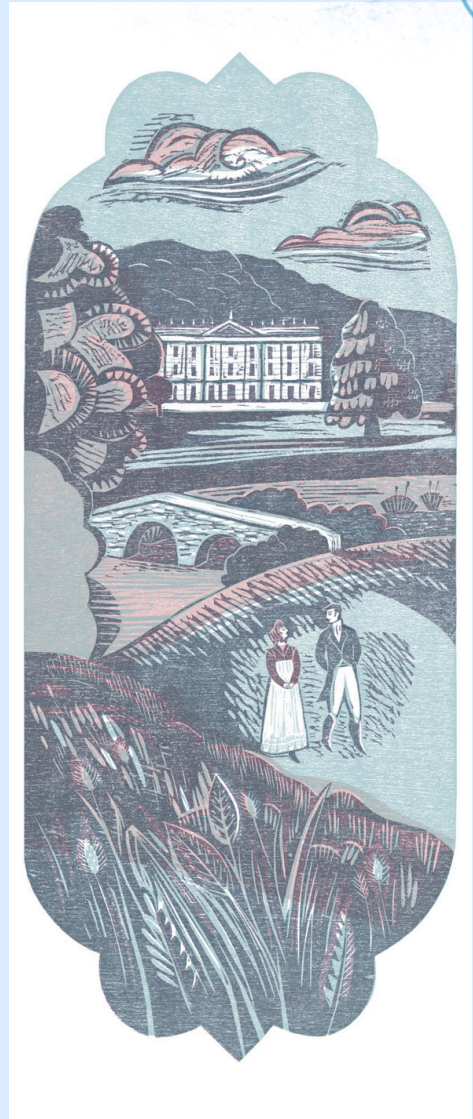
There are of course so many that it really is hard to choose. However, my favourite might possibly be the letter Wentworth gives to Anne at the end of *Persuasion*. Particularly the forlorn line: 'I am half agony, half hope.'

***If Jane Austen could hold this edition in her hands, what part do you think she'd comment on first?***

I rather think she would be struck by the silk and cotton covers. A truly beautiful piece of weaving by Stephen Walters and an elegant design.

***Which Austen character do you think would thrive in today's world?***

Sadly, I rather think Mr. Wickham would do well! However, I'd like to think that the practical and cool-headed Elinor Dashwood would thrive.





# A conversation with Kate Grimwade

Production Director at Folio Society



## ***What were the biggest challenges in producing a box set of this scale and intricacy?***

It is always a challenge to produce a set of books, especially when there are as many as six volumes! From a design aspect, each cover needs to work on its own and with the volumes it sits alongside, and the box design needs to be sympathetic to the books but to not overpower them. Taking an artist's design and translating it into a woven fabric is very complex, so we were so lucky to work with experts who guided us through this process. Finally, the repro work on the illustrations was painstaking and challenging. Sarah Young is a printmaker working with wood and lino and it was complex to translate her artwork into files for litho printing.



## ***The cloth bound covers look exquisite, how did you decide on materials that balance luxury with durability?***

We have worked with Stephen Walters (who wove the fabric for the covers) before, and the results were so wonderful that I was very happy to have the opportunity to work with them again. The luxury is in the silk and in the bespoke design and weaving process. At the same time, the fabric is fit for purpose and durable, just as you'd expect it to be whilst being amazingly tactile. The base colour is woven cotton rather than linen, a nod to Jane Austen's pragmatic nature and to the clothes she would have worn, then the flower design is woven silk.



## ***Can you share a behind-the-scenes detail about the binding or printing process that readers might not know about?***

Smith Settle are brilliant binders, the best in the business, and the care and attention they take over each individual volume is extraordinary. Behind the scenes the fabric was sent to our binders on rolls and a panel for each cover was cut out by hand and lined with paper. As well as the care taken in making the covers, each head and tailband and ribbon marker is tipped in by hand and every copy is inspected to ensure that it is perfect. The limitation label is printed letterpress, a relief printing process, again done by hand.

## ***Did you face any production hurdles?***

Um...well yes, we certainly did, but it is impossible to produce something of this scale and complexity without some bumps in the road. However, with a fabulous team, both within Folio and with our suppliers, we always found a way forward!



# A conversation with Kate Grimwade

Production Director at Folio Society

**Each book has a distinct colour, how tricky was it ensuring the shades worked harmoniously as a set?**

To be honest, it was very tricky. We decided on two silks per volume, alongside the neutral cotton 'ground' colour. We wanted the colours of each volume to reflect the tone of each book and it was a fun process getting there!

We chose wheat and cinnamon, understated colours to reflect Elinor's practical and unpretentious nature for *Sense and Sensibility*, red and pink to reflect the fiery passion of Elizabeth and her romance with Mr Darcy for *Pride & Prejudice*, sky blues reflecting the positive, playful and high-spirited nature of *Emma*, green to represent the estate in *Mansfield Park*, deep purple to evoke the Gothic genre of *Northanger Abbey* and finally stormy sea colours as a nautical theme for *Persuasion*.

The silk colours have wonderful names, for example: Cardinal, Madder, Sedum, Cameo and Cadet!

**How many prototypes or test runs were needed before finalising the finished product?**

The silk took two sample weavings before we perfected the colourways. For the box, we made up to three boxes before we landed on the final design.

**Was there a particular Austen novel that influenced your production decisions more than others?**

Not really, the design and production decisions had to work across all the novels and give the sense of the overall tone of the author. Our aim was to create a set that had a contemporary feel whilst ensuring that this ultimate edition of Austen's novels engaged craftspeople at every stage.

**Did you experiment with different gilding styles (matte, patterned, coloured) before settling on the final look?**

I really like patterned edges but because the covers themselves are so decorative, it wasn't appropriate for this edition. We chose to gild in a subtle and quiet way, hence the soft, white gold.

**What's the one production detail you're most proud of in this set?**

It has to be the silk, I think it is wonderful!

**If you could step into the world of one Austen novel, which would you choose?**

That's a difficult question! *Pride and Prejudice* is so brilliant, so funny, so full of humour and romance. But I am a great fan of *Persuasion* for its subtlety, wit, and because it is all about second chances.





# A conversation with Emily Benton

Award winning graphic designer who designed the presentation box

**The presentation box is stunning! What was your first design inspiration when you knew this was for Austen?**

My immediate inspiration was from Sarah Young's exquisite illustrations, they have this perfect balance of botanical detail and romantic sensibility that feels quintessentially Austen. The challenge was translating those detailed floral motifs into a design that would stand-up to being foiled or silk-screened onto a textured cloth surface. Some detail can get lost in this translation, so we needed to remove the detail and use more of an outline of the illustrations instead, to give them the best chance of reproducing well.

**How did you decide on using florals for the foil pattern?**

The florals came directly from Sarah Young's cover illustrations. I wanted to create a visual conversation between the box and the books themselves. Flowers also feel so right for Austen; her novels are filled with garden walks, countryside rambles, and the language of flowers. The botanical elements capture that sense of natural beauty and refinement that runs through all her work.

**What emotions or themes from Austen's novels were you hoping the box would visually capture?**

I wanted to capture that sense of understated elegance and timeless romance that defines Austen's world. The sage green cloth evokes the English countryside that's so central to her stories, while the gold adds refinement and celebration. There's also something about the way the pattern repeats and flows that speaks to the interconnectedness of her novels.

**Did you design with the idea that the box itself should feel like a keepsake?**

Absolutely. This needed to feel like an heirloom piece. Something that would be treasured and passed down as a complete set. The choice of that exceptional sage linen cloth, the quality of the gold patterning and the structural integrity of the completely removable lid were all decisions made with longevity in mind.



Images: The Complete Novels by Jane Austen, The Folio Society.



# A conversation with Emily Benton

## Award winning graphic designer who designed the presentation box

### Was there a hidden symbolism in the pattern that readers might not immediately notice?

The oval motifs that frame each book's title initials are subtly echoed in the box design, creating this quiet visual dialogue between container and contents. There's also something lovely about how the botanical elements seem to grow and intertwine across the surface, it mirrors how Austen's characters develop and their stories interconnect.

### Which design draft was the wildest idea that didn't make the final cut?

I went down this rabbit hole with super large-scale typography that would wrap around the entire box, imagine "JANE AUSTEN" in massive letters flowing across the front and sides. It was bold and certainly made a statement, but it felt far too heavy-handed for Austen. The typography was competing for attention rather than creating that sense of anticipation and discovery. It also felt very contemporary in a way that didn't honour the timeless quality of her work. Sometimes the most dramatic ideas teach you the most about restraint. That experience really clarified that the box should whisper, not shout.

### How do you balance historical elegance with modern design appeal for a project like this?

It's about finding those timeless elements that feel both period-appropriate and fresh today. The sage green is historically grounded—it's actually drawn from the Mansfield Park cover cloth—but feels very contemporary in its sophistication. The gold foiling technique has centuries of history, but the way we've applied it (as a silkscreen) creates something that feels relevant to modern collectors while honouring traditional bookbinding crafts.

### If Jane Austen were on Bookstagram, what do you think her aesthetic would be?

I think she'd have this beautifully curated feed full of countryside walks, perfectly arranged writing desks with quill pens, and lots of natural light streaming through Georgian windows. Clean, elegant, with just enough wit in her captions to keep you coming back for more



Images: The Complete Novels by Jane Austen, The Folio Society.