

JANE AUSTIN

NEWS FROM NOWHERE

A review by Pat Evans

I found this a totally absorbing book. The descriptions of life in the Welsh university town of Bangor during the Great War were fascinating.

Jane Austin has used letters exchanged by her own family during the period, skilfully weaving fact and fiction to provide a background to a sensitive story of love and loss. It follows the lives of a Welsh Methodist minister and his family who served throughout the War despite their natural inclination to pacifism and faced the grief of loss and the agony of waiting for confirmation. The father and the three sons face the reality of the battles, the pain of injury and the despair of capture, and in one case, death.

Told through the experiences of the only daughter it is a wonderful evocation of how the women who were left at home were able to adapt to their changing circumstances and cope with responsibilities that they could never have dreamed of. In addition, we see the community changing to take in the refugees who had fled the continent as well as the disruption of settled lives as women's horizons expanded into new fields of medicine and science.

The conflict had left long shadows on the lives of those who were left. There was to be no return to the safety and security of the family's pre-war life. It had taken a toll both physical and mental and had completely changed the lives of both men and women but Jane Austin, despite the sadness of the story, has ended on a note of hope as Bronwyn goes off to "let her dreams be her guide".