

Contact information and biography

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Jane Steen is the author of the *House of Closed Doors* series and the *Scott-De-Quincy Mysteries* (*Lady Helena Investigates*). She has been self-publishing her work since 2012, and has since sold over 100,000 books (see book pages for updated sales figures).

Jane was born Jane McGlasson on 26 October 1959 in the county of Surrey in England. She is the oldest of three sisters. Her father worked as an electrical engineer and had his own television and radio business near Bromley in Kent. Her mother combined a passion for gardening with raising three girls and working in the family business.

Jane grew up mostly in Surrey and Kent with a four-year stint in the Midlands. She loved learning as a child and was particularly fond of literature and languages; but faced with the advice that the only thing she could do with a language degree was teach, she opted instead to attend the Secretarial College of the French Institute in London.

After qualifying as a bilingual secretary in 1980, Jane went to Brussels to look for work as there was a dearth of jobs in London. She stayed in the Brussels area for 16 years, working in a variety of jobs—initially administrative, but her writing skills took her into a number of fields including working as a committee reporter for the American Chamber of Commerce, an editor in a law firm, a translator for an aerospace magazine and an associate in a small legal and tax business. During this time she acquired a degree in English law as an external student of the University of London. She also studied Belgian and European Community law locally.

She met and married Bob Steen in Brussels and they moved out to the suburb of Waterloo before the first of their two daughters was born. Jane was in the middle of a masters in European taxation when she quite literally went into labor during class. The difficult years that followed, with three deaths in her husband's family and the discovery that their oldest daughter had a genetic disorder that affected her development, put paid to any hope of becoming a tax expert for the time being.

In 1997 the Steens moved to the Chicago area with their daughters so that Bob, who is American, could pursue his career as a database developer there. They stayed for twenty years. Jane, not wanting to re-qualify in American law, combined freelance work in real estate marketing with a masters degree in liberal studies. The multi-disciplinary degree allowed her to deepen her knowledge of nineteenth-century literature and also introduced her to history, in particular from the angle of art and architecture. She wrote her thesis on “Henry James, Émile Zola, and the artistic genius of the late nineteenth century” and graduated in 2006. She also took up Shotokan karate, attaining her black belt at the age of 48.

While thinking about what she wanted to do with her graduate degree, Jane worked in retail and then as a fundraising director at a Christian university. Her family background and freelance experience having left her with a preference for being her own boss, she eventually moved into freelance writing. At the same time she wrote her first novel, which is still unpublished.

She made the decision to self-publish the second novel she'd written, *The House of Closed Doors*, in 2011 after attending her first writers' conference. She was motivated by the desire to make her own decisions about her career. She also wished to retain her copyright in her work and enjoy creative freedom. She set up her business under the imprint name Aspidistra Press.

In 2016-17, once both of their daughters had finished their education, Jane and Bob moved to the south coast of England to be closer to Jane's family. They run two thriving businesses from their home in Rye. Their oldest daughter lives nearby while the youngest lives in Chicago. Jane's enduring interest, when she's not working or has her nose stuck in a book, is gardening. She also pursues various handcraft projects but admits to being better at starting them than finishing.

Title information

The House of Closed Doors Series

Nell Lillington's struggle to reconcile independence, love, and respectability begins with her refusal to name her baby's father, and the path to her ideal life is strewn with murder. Set in the American Midwest of the 1870s, this series blends suspense, romance, history, and family drama in a fast-paced clean read.

The House of Closed Doors (Book 1)

First published June 25, 2012

Small town Illinois, 1870: Desperate to avoid marriage, Nell Lillington refuses to divulge the name of her child's father and accepts her stepfather's decision that the baby be born at a Poor Farm and discreetly adopted . . . until an unused padded cell is opened and two small bodies fall out. Nell is the only resident of the Poor Farm who is convinced that the unwed mother and her baby were murdered, and the incident prompts her to rethink her own life. But the secret she uncovers means she may have no safe place to run to.

Format	Publication date	ASIN	ISBN
Kindle	June 25, 2012	B008EWNCC4	978-0-9857150-0-7
ePub	October 8, 2012		978-0-9857150-1-4
Audiobook	March 18, 2014	B00J3FRJAW	
US trade paperback	August 1, 2014		978-0-9857150-2-1
UK trade paperback	December 9, 2020		978-1-9138100-3-0
Large print edition	December 9, 2020		978-0-9957484-9-1
Page count	370 Pages		
Audiobook duration	8 hours 48 minutes		

Sales to December 31, 2022

Over 6,000 copies sold and over 670,000 free downloads.

Typical reader reviews

"One of the most original books I've read in ages."

"I have read criticism involving the fleeting introductions of characters, how they would be semi-developed but not a major part of the story. This was one of the aspects I felt was most relatable; in life itself there are many people that make an impact on your life, that shape both yours and your acquaintances characters, even if they are only a fleeting aspect of it."

"A good author is marked by a skill to make even topics that we might find not to our tastes interesting and exciting. As far as excitement goes, The House of Closed Doors is not exactly a high-octane thriller, and more of a slow-burning mystery unraveller. The mystery unspools on a carefully measured timescale which I found to be judged just right – I was given just enough to feel satisfied but enough remained unresolved to prompt me into Just Another Chapter syndrome."

"This book was a hard one to put down. It was a story of great hardship and strength of character. It was a delight to read and an absorbing account of the trials that were endured by unmarried mothers in the 19th century. How appreciative it is to have authors in this day and age, who take the time to research our history books, in order to write such good novels. I can't wait to read other books by this author, especially the follow on of this book and I am hoping there will be a happy ending for our heroine. Thank you Jane."

"A historical masterpiece"

The House of Closed Doors Series

Eternal Deception (Book 2)

First published December 31, 2015

Frontier Kansas, 1872: Nell hopes to support her daughter Sarah and friend Tess by working as a seamstress in an isolated seminary, despite the hostility she encounters there. As her talent as a dressmaker begins to win her commissions, Nell attracts the attention of two suitors: Reiner Lehmann, a wealthy senior student, and Judah Poulton, an impoverished professor. Shocking news from back home and another death at the seminary press Nell to make her decision.

Format	Publication date	ASIN	ISBN
Kindle	December 31, 2015	B01A2MSQGU	978-0-9857150-4-5
ePub	October 31, 2016		978-0-9857150-6-9
Audiobook	September 22, 2016	B01M15T54W	
US trade paperback	October 31, 2016		978-0-9857150-7-6
UK trade paperback	December 9, 2020		978-1-913810-04-7
Large print edition	December 9, 2020		978-1-913810-00-9
Page count	476 pages		
Audiobook duration	12 hours 56 minutes		

Sales to December 31, 2022

Over 40,000 copies sold

Typical reader reviews

"Nell came out of this book and greeted me like any good friend would. Jane Steen's writing paints the most beautiful and sometimes terrifying pictures in your mind."

"This was a great follow up, can't wait to read the next book. What a powerful story, with great characters. Thank you for keeping me enthralled."

"This is a magnificent book. I'll probably run out of adjectives to describe just how much I loved this rich, perfectly well written, solidly well-constructed, with amazingly well-built characters and absolutely well-structured in its time period novel. This is a historical novel that seems to have been written at that time period, not now, so immersed in that time the reader feels. Not just the settings but all the descriptions of the clothes are so rich and so beautiful!"

"Jane Steen has written a wonderful book. Nell is a young woman who has suffered from the mistake she made. She has to work hard to support her child and a close friend. The twists and turns are surprising and keeps the readers intrigued from start to finish. I cannot wait to read her next book!"

"I am drawn to the author's style and literary pacing. Introspective and insightful. She creates such an empathy for the characters... an unwed 20-year-old mother in the 1800s asserting herself? Being strong and assertive? Blasphemous but thrilling. Someone had to begin. I found myself cheering for Nell."

The House of Closed Doors Series

The Shadow Palace (Book 3)

First published July 29, 2016

Chicago, 1876: Chicago, and her new wealth, offer Nell the promise of longed-for independence. Yet how can she settle in a town where she's far too likely to run into Martin Rutherford and his glittering, faithless wife, Lucetta? Can she resist her love for Martin for Sarah's sake? But when Martin is arrested for murder, Nell's dreams appear to be swallowed up in the new web of secrets she constructs to help him. Secrets that threaten to alienate Tess, Sarah, and even Martin.

Format	Publication date	ASIN	ISBN
Kindle	July 29, 2016	B01JDKL510	978-0-9857150-5-2
ePub	July 30, 2016		978-0-9857150-3-8
Audiobook	January 31, 2017	B01NAXLTGF	
US trade paperback	March 1, 2017		978-0-9857150-8-3
UK trade paperback	December 9, 2020		978-1-913810-05-4
Large print edition	December 9, 2020		978-1-913810-01-6
Page count	450 pages		
Audiobook duration	12 hours 8 minutes		

Sales to December 31, 2022

Over 30,000 copies sold

Typical reader reviews

"From the first book in the trilogy, Jane Steen draws the reader into the mind and circumstances of this unique character. It is a fascinating and compelling story of, not just one character, but her 'supporting and indispensable' cast of characters, in narrow span of American history. I suggest you go ahead and buy all three books together... three solid, yet delectable, 'bites' of reading pleasure. Enjoy!"

"The twists and turns of the story kept surprising me right to the end. I have a strong interest in dressmaking which made them all the more entertaining. Thank you."

"Jane Steen draws her women in some detail, giving the reader a flavour of what life was like for the ordinary woman in 1870s Chicago."

"Beautiful well written and mesmerising. One book was not enough, so absorbing had to read all three. Will read again in the future."

"Once you open the first door...

...you can't stop until all have been opened and experienced. Loved the series, and especially the inclusion of terms no longer used in modern times. Just when one obstacle was dealt with, there were often several more thrown in to keep you on edge. Without giving any spoilers, there was one loose thread at the end in my mind – and it wasn't dangling from a spool or a garment being sewn. Don't you wonder?"

"This was the final book in a 3-book series that I hated to actually finish reading. Not because I didn't enjoy it but rather because I hated it to actually end! What a truly wonderful story! This author made the pages come alive for me. I walked into Nell's world just like a friend. Read this book. You won't be sorry."

The House of Closed Doors Series

The Jewel Cage (Book 4)

First published December 13, 2020

Adjusting to wedlock isn't easy for a woman whose initial aversion to the married state took her to the Poor Farm. When a tragedy out of the blue prompts her to repay past debts, her charitable instincts threaten to wreck her happy new life. What does she really want and what does she really need? Join the beloved characters from The House of Closed Doors Series as we bridge the years between Nell's Story and Sarah's, interweaving stories of love and despair, darkness and light in the turbulent Chicago of the late 1870s.

Format	Publication date	ASIN	ISBN
Kindle	December 13, 2020	B08QJQ6426	978-1-913810-07-8
ePub	December 13, 2020		978-1-913810-07-8
UK trade paperback	December 31, 2020		978-1-913810-08-5
Large print edition	March 22, 2021		978-1-913810-09-2
Page count	548 pages		

Typical reader reviews

"Another magnificent display of writing skill and story construction... I am struck by Ms. Steen's ability to grant her readers a truly revealing glimpse of the strength and weaknesses of her characters from the reactions and thoughts of those who interact with them. As far as I am concerned, this saga could continue until old age disposes of each dynamic character."

"I loved every word of this book. Reading over the span of years during the Victorian Era is enlightening and delightful. My grandmother was born in 1878 and worked as a seamstress in a little General Store in the late 1800s until she married. I'm so looking forward to reading more about the challenges and achievements of Martin and Nell, Tess and Donny, and definitely Sarah!"

"I really enjoyed the Closed Door Series, so I was glad to get to revisit Nell and Martin again. I'm looking forward to the next series of books that will revolve around the life of Nell's daughter Sarah."

The Scott-De Quincy Mysteries

A reluctant lady sleuth finds she's investigating her own family. This projected 7-book series, set in gorgeous Sussex countryside close to the English Channel coast, blends the lady sleuth trope as popularized by Deanna Raybourn with a Downton Abbey-style saga of changing social mores in late Victorian England.

Lady Helena Investigates (Book 1)

First published March 14, 2018

1881, Sussex. Lady Helena Scott-De Quincy's marriage to Sir Justin Whitcombe gave new purpose to a life almost destroyed by the death of Helena's first love. Helena is content with her quiet country life until Sir Justin is found dead in the river overlooked by their grand baroque mansion.

The intrusion of attractive, mysterious French physician Armand Fortier, with his meddling theory of murder, into Helena's first weeks of mourning is bad enough. But with her initial ineffective efforts at investigation and her attempts to revive her long-abandoned interest in herbalism comes the realization that she may have been mistaken about her own family's past.

Every family has its secrets. The Scott-De Quincy family has more than most.

Format	Publication date	ASIN	ISBN
Kindle	March 14, 2018	B079SMGC7S	978-0-9957484-2-2
ePub	March 14, 2018		978-0-9957484-3-9
Audiobook	October 10, 2018	B07KGKM7HN	978-0-9957484-5-3
UK trade paperback	May 30, 2018		978-0-9957484-4-6
Large print edition			978-0-9957484-5-3
Page count	400 pages		
Audiobook duration	11 hours 29 minutes		

Sales to December 31, 2022

Over 50,000 copies sold

Typical reader reviews

"A rewarding, satisfying and delightful read. With fascinating historical context and content."

"What I particularly enjoyed was the author's vivid portrayal of the Sussex countryside which really jumped off the page. She has also done her homework on Victorian customs and practices and we get some delightful insights into everyday life for both the landed gentry and the lower orders. Recommended!"

"I knew I would love this book after reading the first page. Ms Steen obviously an expert on the Victorian era and takes the reader right into the world of the Scott-De Quincy family with their complicated dynamics."

"In a seeming domino effect, mysteries come out of the woodwork under the gentle hands of Lady Helena as she attempts to find truth amidst a suicide, local gossip, the ravings of a fevered and fallen tenant, and her own family secrets. All the while, Steen artfully weaves in contemporary social and political issues, including the development and eventual passage of the Married Women's Property Act of 1882, the infantilization of women in Victorian England, and the role of disabilities in their male counterparts. Lady Helena Investigates is a well-rounded story that readers from all backgrounds can appreciate."

"This was my first venture into historical novels, and I loved it!"

Book blog/editorial reviews

“Jane Steen is a master storyteller, weaving the heartaches of grief with familial affairs and new relationships in a way which truly transcends time. Lady Helena Investigates challenges conventional period tropes while transporting the reader to a time as complex as ours, yet rife with the nostalgia modern audiences crave. Beautiful language and sensual prose, Jane Steen has gifted us with a modern classic.” (Silverwood Sketches book blog, April 2018)

“Jane Steen has done a cracking job; I felt emotionally invested in Helena’s story and was glad to see her get some closure towards the end. The book is set up nicely for a sequel and I look forward to seeing Helena continue to come into her own, as well as learning more about the mysterious Monsieur Fortier.” (Rachael’s Ramblings book blog, March 2018)

“I love historical fiction and especially enjoy historical mysteries. I found Lady Helena Investigates to be an engrossing novel from the first pages. Lady Helena is an intelligent, independent thinking woman in early 1880's England. I really enjoyed seeing her thought process and watching her emerging independence over the course of this novel.” (Birdhouse book blog, March 2018)

“I really enjoyed Lady Helena Investigates – a lovely example of a light, entertaining historical mystery.” (What Cathy Read Next book blog, April 2018)

Lady Odelia's Secret (Book 2)

First published March 7, 2022

In the 1880s a sixth daughter learns not to ask for much, even if she's the daughter of an earl. Even if she married the richest man in her corner of Sussex. Even if she's now a widow with a splendid Georgian mansion.

Lady Helena Whitcombe is still trying to adjust to widowhood and reconcile her family loyalties with her desires when her artist sister Odelia makes a startling suggestion. Why not make her mark on the house that's now all hers, by commissioning a magnificent work of art from one of London's most celebrated painters?

Lady Odelia invites Helena into the seductive world of medieval fantasies and fairy tales she has inhabited since Helena was a child. But when a shocking series of events exposes the destructive reality of a great artist's unusual lifestyle, Helena, and her lady's maid Guttridge are called on to help—or is it to interfere?

Looming danger, the risk of scandal, and competing loyalties force Helena to re-evaluate her relationship with the sister she's always loved the most.

Format	Publication date	ASIN	ISBN
Ebook	March 7, 2022	B09RWW546Z	978-1-913810-18-4
Audiobook	N/A	B0B3NHQSKC	N/A
UK trade paperback	May 17, 2022		978-1-913810-19-1
Large print edition			
Page count	444 pages		
Audiobook duration	12 hours 59 minutes		

Advance praise for Lady Odelia's Secret

"What a powerful story of loyalty, honor, responsibility, and love. Helena's devotion to her family and search for truth involve her in long-time secrets and present-day danger. I can't wait for her next investigation!"

"Helena knew she had a serious decision to make when the threats increased, and death came knocking at the door. An intriguing mix of romance and mystery, it was captivating and entertaining, a worthy must-read."

"An amazing piece of work. A look into the painting and artist world and the secrets that families can hold. Because Lady Helena is the youngest in the family, she realises that she really doesn't know her siblings as she thought she did. Scandal that she has been protected from rears its head and Helena needs to get to the bottom of it. Reading this story was like boarding a train that picks up speed and takes you through surroundings both beautiful and desolate ending in a place you hadn't imagined. A great follow up to "Lady Helena Investigates" with tantalising titbits to what is to come in subsequent stories in this series. Looking forward to the next book."

Victorian Hauntings

The Victorian Hauntings series of short stories draws on tales of the supernatural from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an era when newspaper circulation boomed and there was a huge popular demand for short-form entertainment. E.F. Benson's *The Room in the Tower* (1912), E.M. Forster's *The Machine Stops* (1909) and tales by Guy de Maupassant and O. Henry were the main inspirations behind these short pieces, which are (like any good Victorian story) mildly moralistic.

The Unforgotten (short story)

First Published October 1, 2016

The fog that rolled in off Lake Michigan that November morning was not an unusual phenomenon. But when Peter finished buttoning his coat to ward off the chill, he realized he was no longer alone in the lakeside cemetery. Was his past catching up with him?

Format	Publication date	ASIN	ISBN
Kindle	October 1, 2016	B01LWRDA30	
ePub	October 1, 2016		
Page count	29 pages		

Typical reader reviews

"A message delivered in this paranormal/mystery fictional story, and what a life-changing message it was to the main character in this life story."

"I swear, Jane Steen is a time traveller. That's the only explanation. With each book she masters the language, the setting, the whole vibe of the time even more..."

The Bars of the Marshalsea (short story)

First Published January 4, 2017

The ghost of Charles Dickens is restless. Eternity is so long, and the world has changed in ways he finds hard to accept. His thoughts take him to his first real home on Doughty Street in London, where he encounters another spirit – a small boy with the unmistakable stamp of poverty upon him. A boy from his own time, and one who has clearly claimed the right to haunt the home where Dickens knew the first taste of success.

But why? The answer to Dickens' question is in the attic, and will confront the shade of one of the best-loved authors in the English language with a secret he's kept all his life.

Format	Publication date	ASIN	ISBN
Kindle	January 4, 2017	B01MU7NPOF	
ePub	January 4, 2017		
Page count	28 pages		

Typical reader reviews

"A perfect read for fans of Dickens, historical fiction, and/or ghost stories."

"Interesting juxtaposition of current life with Dickens history and A Christmas Carol that reflects on the motivation for his writing and the way he might perceive current progress."