The Time Traveller’s Guide to Regency Britain by Ian Mortimer

Book report by Vinayak Obitz, 8RA

Overview:

The Time traveller’s guide series by Ian Mortimer largely follow the same formula: they provide a detailed insight into how the people of a previous age lived, including the burdens placed upon them by law and society, where they lived, the culture in which they lived, what they ate, what they did for entertainment, what they believed in, and what they did to keep a roof over their heads.

These books start with the time travellers guide to medieval England, progressing through several eras of British History, such as the middle ages, the Elizabethan era, the Restoration and the Regency. They are written in an informative yet refreshingly fast paced, informal manner, almost akin to a fiction work or an actual travel guide, meaning unlike many history books, it does not make you feel as if you are too bored to carry on after the first few pages.

Background:

This entry in the series provides an insight into the regency, and the times before and after it, the 50 years between 1780 and 1830. This was an age characterised by the phasing out of the old ways of life, and the meteoric rise of the industrial revolution, an era in which Britain became at the forefront of industry and innovation, an era of great change in Britain and Europe.

This book answered, for me at least, every question I had about this age, and also gave me several interesting facts which I was not aware of beforehand, such as that the national gallery was created in response to the French opening the Louvre, and that the anti vaccine movement’s unbridled stupidity started as soon as Edward Jenner invented vaccination.

Chapters:

1. The Landscape: mentions the towns, cities, villages and landscapes, as well as what people though of it

2. London, which focuses on the titular city, and how people lived there in the Regency

3 .The people: mentions jobs, income brackets, life expectancy and so forth

4. Character: talks of the attitudes, personalities, character and thoughts of the people of Regency Britain

5. Practicalities: Talks of taxation, the postal system, the things people dealt with in daily life, and numerous other features of daily life

6. What to wear: talks of the fashions of the age, and how they changed

7. Travelling: Talks of how people travelled in the era, the state of the roads, the bridges built, and how quickly you could expect to travel around the nation

8.Where to stay: This chapter provides an in-depth view of the houses, streets and cities that the people called home, and where travellers would stay.

9. What to eat, drink and smoke: what people ate, the prices of food, where people ate and what people would drink and smoke

10. Cleanliness, health and medicine: this chapter tells of how good was the medical knowledge of the time, and how many people could access medical help

11. Law and order. This chapter discusses the (frankly ridiculous) laws of the age, how they were enforced, and how common was crime.

12. Entertainment: The way people enjoy themselves often tells who they are, and this detail is often omitted from history books: this looks at the fascinating topic of what they did for fun, what others thought of it, and how people deliberately chose to gamble vast amounts for no apparent reason. It also helps build a picture of how cultured the people of the age were, and the literature, plays, museums and operas.