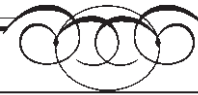


The Female Spectator

CHAWTON HOUSE LIBRARY



VOL.15 No.4, Autumn 2011

ISSN1746-8604

THE DIVERSE WOMEN OF CHAWTON HOUSE LIBRARY

By Gillian Dow

All those who have visited Chawton House Library will be familiar with our very fine portrait of the actress Mary Robinson (1756/8-1800). Painted by John Hoppner in 1782, the portrait shows Robinson in her most famous role as Perdita, the heroine of *The Winter's Tale*. It was in this role at a famous royal command performance in 1779 that the young Prince of Wales was first captivated by her: a short-lived affair was to follow. We are delighted that Mrs. Robinson has returned to London for the winter season this year, where she is making something of a splash in the National Portrait Gallery's current exhibition *The First Actresses: Nell Gwynn to Sarah Siddons*.

When Professor Gill Perry first came to Chawton House Library to view the portrait in 2008, we had little idea that Robinson would become one of the star portraits, displayed on banners and posters around London in her festive red and green. In fact, as Perry explores in her essay 'Painting Actresses' Lives', written as an introduction to the book accompanying the exhibition, throughout her career as an actress

Robinson was famous for her appearances in flamboyant costumes both on and off stage [...] the actress's public identity was often confused with her costumed performances on stages, and the painted portrait was similarly conflated with the 'real' person.

Robinson was acutely aware of such 'conflations', as her posthumously published 1801 *Memoirs* demonstrate. Her deft self-fashioning in this work was purposefully designed to elicit the sympathy of her readers, and functions as a 'defense' of her public role. The Chawton House Library copy of these memoirs can be viewed in the exhibition, alongside many fine portraits and artefacts belonging to Robinson's contemporaries. Perhaps the current outing to London will encourage people to come and view Mary Robinson *in situ* when she

returns to Chawton in February, and, even better, to read some of the fine poetry that defines the final, more private, years of her career.

The exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery is just one successful event that Chawton House Library has been proud to be a part of this year, and that demonstrates that academic research can have considerable public impact. Our *Sense and Sensibility* study day in September was another such event. With six fine talks from notable Austen and Romantic-Period scholars, we celebrated Jane Austen's first publication with considerable style.

More recently, the library has hosted our usual monthly evening lectures. Our October lecture focused on Elizabeth Rose of Kilravock. Dr Mark Towsey gave a talk on her 'life in reading', an examination which focused on her reading journals to reconstruct her self-educating practices in the late eighteenth century. Elizabeth Rose was no radical reader: she felt Fordyce was a friend to her sex, and her admiration of Rousseau seems to have been uncomplicated by any concerns about the French writer's thoughts on the education of women! And yet her journals and books of extracts have much to tell the book historian about how such women used their libraries. In November, Dr Debbie Welham gave an account of the life of Penelope Aubin (c.1679-c.1738). In a lecture that focused on the web a twenty-first century biographer must untangle

when she wishes to construct a portrait of a now-forgotten woman writer, Debbie captured both the excitement of the chase, and the joys of archival research. We all left knowing far more about Aubin's life than we had thought possible when we arrived. Both lectures can be found on this webpage, in podcast form: <http://www.soton.ac.uk/scecs/newsandevents/lectures.html>

It remains only, then, to remind all our friends and supporters to consult the Chawton House Library and Southampton Centre for Eighteenth-Century Studies webpages for details of events to be held in 2012. And to wish you happy end of year holidays, and all best wishes for the New Year.



Mrs Mary Robinson (1758-1800) as 'Perdita', by John Hoppner 1758-1810. Oil on Canvas. Copyright Chawton House Library.

The Female Spectator

Autumn 2011

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FACES OF CHAWTON

Ray Moseley, Information Officer, Chawton House Library

I first visited Chawton House at 0030hrs on Saturday 16th September 1989. A strange time to visit, I hear you say; however, at that time I was a serving Police Officer, patrolling in the 'area car' when I was directed to an alarm activation at Chawton House. My most endearing memory of the house was, despite its run-down appearance, the stained glass in the windows on the staircase which were fantastic. However, it was discovered to be a false alarm. Little was I to know that, eighteen years later, I would be walking through the doors of Chawton House Library as a volunteer.

I left school at 15 and started an apprenticeship as an electrician, although my dream was to be a Police Officer. That dream was realised in May 1980, when I joined the Hampshire Constabulary. I experienced many large-scale police operations, from policing Greenham Common, where the cruise missiles were based, the miners' strike, and the Poll Tax riots, to name but a few. Sadly, after 25 years' service I was medically retired and after a period of convalescence, I found myself volunteering at Chawton.

I now work at Chawton House Library as the Information Officer, a complete contrast to my previous occupation. My work has expanded over the 4 years I have been here and involves keeping the Friends' and Members' database updated, updating the website and sending out the posters and leaflets promoting our events and lectures. I also run the shop, the online version and the physical one in the Game Larder. We have over 1500 followers on Twitter and over 600 Facebook followers, (please visit and sign up for 'up to the minute' information). It is a very varied and interesting role, and I love it!



Ray Moseley at the ball

CHAWTON CHRONICLES: A LETTER FROM THE CEO

It is two hundred years since the first edition of *Sense and Sensibility* was published. This anniversary was marked in considerable style by the Jane Austen Society of North America at its AGM in Fort Worth, Texas in October. I had the good fortune to be able to participate in the event which was inspiring and enjoyable in equal measure. I have now attended four such meetings and continue to be impressed and fascinated by the wide range of people they attract – from seasoned Janeites to film and TV celebrities, and from notable academic commentators to recent converts to Austen's work. This mix seems to work tremendously well as it generates energy, enthusiasm and erudition (contributors this year included Andrew Davies, whose television adaptations have enjoyed much acclaim – he talked on 'Mr. Darcy's Wet Shirt and Other Embarrassments: Some Pleasure and Pitfalls in Austen Adaptations'. Other key addresses included Elaine Bander, Juliet McMaster and Peter Sabor whose collaborative presentation was entitled 'The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of *Sense and Sensibility*' and from the Chair of the North American Friends of Chawton House Library, Professor Joan Ray, '*Sense and Sensibility* as Austen's Problem Novel').

In addition to providing a platform for many fine speakers, the gathering in Texas allowed for some eye-catching initiatives – it is unlikely, for example, that the good folk of Fort Worth had ever, previously, witnessed a promenade around Sundance Square of some 300 individuals dressed in full Regency costume. It is even harder to imagine what the occupants of, what used to be known as Hell's Half Acre, would have made of it: the Sundance Kid and the Wild Bunch are unlikely to have encountered ladies of such refinement! Whatever the activity, however, there was one common denominator – all were extremely well managed and delivered thanks to the local organizing group under the leadership of Dr Cheryl Kinney and to the Society's Board, led by Iris Kutz. JASNA's membership now exceeds 3,000 and provides wonderful support to charities such as Chawton House Library. This backing is incredibly important for us at the best of times, but is doubly valuable during a period of severe economic constraint. I would like to use the pages of *The Female Spectator* to acknowledge the debt owed by the Library to its many donors in the USA and Canada who provide generous, annual contributions – thank you for all your help and we look forward to welcoming many of you to this beautiful corner of Hampshire in the years to come.

If you are able to visit we hope that you will also have the opportunity to become involved in our fast-expanding programme of events. Recent examples include a most successful Study Day



Regency Ball at Chawton House Library

to celebrate the bicentenary of *Sense and Sensibility*; theatre performances such as 'How to distinguish the Sensitive and the Sensible' by the Artifice Company; a Regency Ball at the 'Great House'; Apple Day, which introduced many old apple varieties to a new audience, young and old; and a raft of lectures and seminars, including 'The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen' by Lindsay Ashford. We continue to review the calendar and already have a stimulating schedule planned for 2012 – more on this in the next edition.

Before then, we have the publication, in late November, of the anthology of winning submissions from the 2011 CHL short story competition. Entitled *Wooing Mr. Wickham*, it is an admirable follow-up to the 2009 publication, *Dancing with Mr. Darcy* (which sold over 15,000 copies worldwide). It is published by Honno and will be available, as they say, at all good bookstores near you or can be ordered from the CHL website – www.chawtonhouse.org

Finally, as I write this piece, December 25th seems a long way off, but it will, as always, be here before we know it. As part of the CHL festive celebrations there will be an open house on the 17th and 18th December with Edwardian-style decorations and traditional fare as described by Montagu Knight (1844-1914) in his letters and records. This event, and the others I have referred to in this and other columns, demonstrate, I think, a truly integrated approach to education, where academics, the arts, literature, nature and a spirit of community combine to produce the most stimulating of environments. We look forward to continuing this exciting work in 2012.

Many thanks to all, Happy Holidays, and very best wishes for the New Year.

Stephen Lawrence

THE CONTRADICTIONARY RHETORIC OF NEEDLEWORK IN JANE AUSTEN'S LETTERS AND NOVELS

Ellen Kennedy Johnson is a Professor of English at Arizona State University and has a forthcoming book titled Gender and Needlework in Late Georgian Arts and Letters

In April 1815, Mary Lamb published an essay titled 'On Needlework' for the *British Ladies Magazine* in which she proclaimed that 'needlework and reading are in a natural state of warfare.'¹ Lamb's essay echoed the thoughts of many philosophical thinkers of the time: by the end of the 18th century, needlework was used as a trope by Romantic women writers to expose what they considered the imposition of unproductive educational skills upon the female sex as a way of creating a standard for middle-class womanhood. They argued that the repetitiveness of needlework did not allow women's minds to develop to their full capacity and that myriad hours spent embellishing gowns and hats not only destroyed their eyesight but encouraged women to be trivial and self-centred. While revolutionary political writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Elizabeth Montagu insisted that reading become the necessary replacement for needlework in a young woman's education, so, too, did more conservative writers such as Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Hannah More.

While it is not clear whether Jane Austen read any of these political tracts, her writing, closely examined, reveals a contradictory sensibility about the function of needlework commensurate with the on-going cultural discussion. While her personal letters portray needlework as a productive and fulfilling activity, in her novels needlework functions rhetorically to convey women's emotional and psychological powerlessness. By juxtaposing needlework and reading, privileging the latter as the more rational pursuit, Austen marks her heroines for success or failure according to their ability to extricate themselves from what became a gendered and highly symbolic practice.

Shared collaboration of needlework projects with her family and friends earns a prominent position in Austen's life and is substantiated many times over in her personal letters. She represents sewing as meaningful work and recalls the joy of shopping for fabrics and notions, discussing the changing styles of the day, and making handmade gifts for family and friends. 'I wish I could help you in your needlework,' Austen

writes to her sister Cassandra visiting relatives in London in December of 1808, 'I have two hands and a thimble that lead a very idle life.'² Despite Austen's talent as a seamstress, the exuberant praise she heaps on Cassandra for making her a dress demonstrates the intimacy of such a handmade present. After receiving Cassandra's gift in the post, Austen effuses, 'Thank you five hundred and forty times for the exquisite piece of workmanship which was brought into the room this morning.'³ In her letters, she mentions making dresses, coats, layettes, furniture coverings, mourning clothes, wedding attire, hats, and military clothing for her brothers serving in the Napoleonic Wars.

Details of shopping trips for fabrics and notions enliven Austen's letters and illustrate her awareness of the latest trends in colour, style, and fashion. Trimming hats and gowns with handmade laces and imported ribbon allowed women to update their wardrobes according to the latest Paris fashions and Austen's letters abound with works in progress. 'I have determined,' she writes, 'to trim my lilac sarsenet with black satin ribbon,' and with this handmade addition, 'it will be a very useful gown, happy to go anywhere.'⁴ English women stitched detailed accessories to enhance their more simple clothing as featured in court paintings and publications such as *Ackermann's Repository of the Arts*.

However, the obvious pleasure Austen finds in the activities surrounding her personal needlework projects is notably absent in her imaginative work. In her novels, Austen uses the word 'work' when referring to needlework, a common term used to describe the sewing and stitching done by middle and upper class women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, she often uses the word 'busyness' in her novels to describe women's 'work', and in *Northanger Abbey*, further reduces the practice to the snide oxymoron, 'busy idleness'⁵ a direct juxtaposition to the respect she expresses for needlework

in her letters. The heroines in her novels create few 'happy gowns' and rarely speak pleasurably about bombazine, cambric muslins, or China crepes as she does in her letters. Instead, the women in



Mary Lamb, from a portrait in the Charvaton House Library collection

2 Jane Austen, *Letters*, Deirdre La Faye, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 18 April, 1811.

3 Jane Austen, 23 September 1813.

4 Jane Austen, 5 March 1814.

5 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (London: MacMillan and Company, [1817], 1897), p.52.

1 Lamb, Mary, 'On Needlework', in *British Lady's Magazine*, 1, 4 (April 1815).

Austen's novels are weighted down with the practice of needlework and the execution of it seems obtuse, endless, and unproductive.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Elinor, by 'taking up some work from the table' cloaks her grief at the mention of the new Mrs. Ferras.⁶ Later, when Edward visits the Dashwoods and explains that he is not married, 'his words were echoed with unspeakable astonishment by all but Elinor, who sat, with her head leaning over her work, in a state of such agitation as made her hardly know where she was.'⁷ In *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot, consumed with thoughts about Colonel Wentworth, stitches 'for half an hour together, equally without error, and equally without consciousness.'⁸ The wealthy Emma Woodhouse is not interested in needlework as she has 'an active and busy mind,' but declares that when she is in 'want of employment when she is forty or fifty'⁹ she will do carpet work after all the other appealing options, such as reading, music, and drawing are no longer options. Austen's novels teem with references to the insipid repetitiveness of needlework and the simplistic minds of those who do it.

Austen's most revealing treatment of needlework is in her novel *Mansfield Park*, where she renders Lady Bertram oblivious to any of her responsibilities as the custodian of the domestic realm. The only aspect of domesticity Lady Bertram feigns an interest in is doing needlework, which Austen's narrator describes as having 'little use and no beauty'¹⁰ She is slightly more animated by this task than she is of other obligations as the lady of the house, but even here, she enlists Fanny to '[get] through the difficulties of her work for her' while she '[falls] into a gentle doze.'¹¹ While everyone listened attentively to the Bertrams' adventures in far-away lands, only the account of a shipwreck 'lift[ed] her eyes from her work to say, 'Dear me! How disagreeable.'¹² Throughout the book, needlework serves to obfuscate any awareness on Lady Bertram's part of her husband's foreign endeavors, her son's increasing dissipation, and her daughter's marital infidelity.



Figures grouped around a sewing workbox, c. 1811, from an anonymous scrapbook of fashion plates in the Library's collection

Conversely, Austen posits reading in her novels as the proper replacement for needlework, as proposed by both radical and conservative thinkers of the day. Mr. Darcy's manifesto about the qualities a truly accomplished woman must possess begins by rejecting the conventional wisdom that one 'deserves [the designation] no otherwise than by netting a purse, or covering a screen' and punctuates his long list, including 'her manner of walking, the tone of her voice, and her address and expression' with the trait he most admires

in an accomplished woman: 'the improvement of her mind by extensive reading.'¹³ Elizabeth prefers reading to needlework and she has little patience for such a mind-numbing chore as her younger sisters do. Similarly, in *Mansfield Park*, Edmund is 'amused and gratified by seeing how [Fanny] gradually slackened in the needlework, which at the beginning [of her stay] seemed to occupy her totally.'¹⁴ Fanny's transformation at the hands of Edmund from sitting 'motionless' over her needlework to a woman who reads is consistent with the escalating early nineteenth-century tracts calling for women to abandon the needle in favour of what was perceived as more enlightening educational pursuits.

In Austen's personal reflections, needlework, as a material practice, in and of itself was not this kind of hollow exercise she refers to in her novels; instead, her letters identify both the personal meaning, productive necessity, and social benefits of women's sewing and stitching. Only when needlework is read within the context of an ideological construction such as feminine accomplishment does the work seem to lose its meaning and its invention function is erased. As Austen's letters never position needlework merely within the constellation of feminine activity or diminishes its importance, perhaps her treatment of women's work in her novels and her desire to see her heroines read reveals a deft understanding of the way needlework operated in culture by reducing a woman's productive capability to irrelevant symbolic acts.

Ultimately, the contradictions discussed in Austen's writing exposes the difference between theory and practice: while Austen's novels imagine a new world order, where women are respected for more than just domestic trivialities, her letters contribute to our understanding of the importance of women's needlework to the culture, performed in the private sphere, yet having great significance to the world outside the home.

6 Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, Claudia Johnson, ed., (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2002), p. 254.

7 Jane Austen, p. 254.

8 Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, Linda Bree, ed., (Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press, 2000), pgs. 104-5.

9 Jane Austen, *Emma* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, [1815] 1950), p. 113.

10 Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), p. 9.

11 Jane Austen, p.126.

12 Jane Austen, p.236.

13 Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.76.

14 Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, p. 337.

FICTION IN THE HAMPSHIRE CHRONICLE, 1772-1829

By Ruth Facer

Ruth Facer is a local Friend of Chawton House Library, and the author of *Mary Bacon's World: A Farmer's Wife in Eighteenth-Century Hampshire*. This book, and many others, can be purchased from the Chawton House Library online gift shop, thus helping to raise funds for the Library's future development. <http://www.chawton.org/shop/index.html>

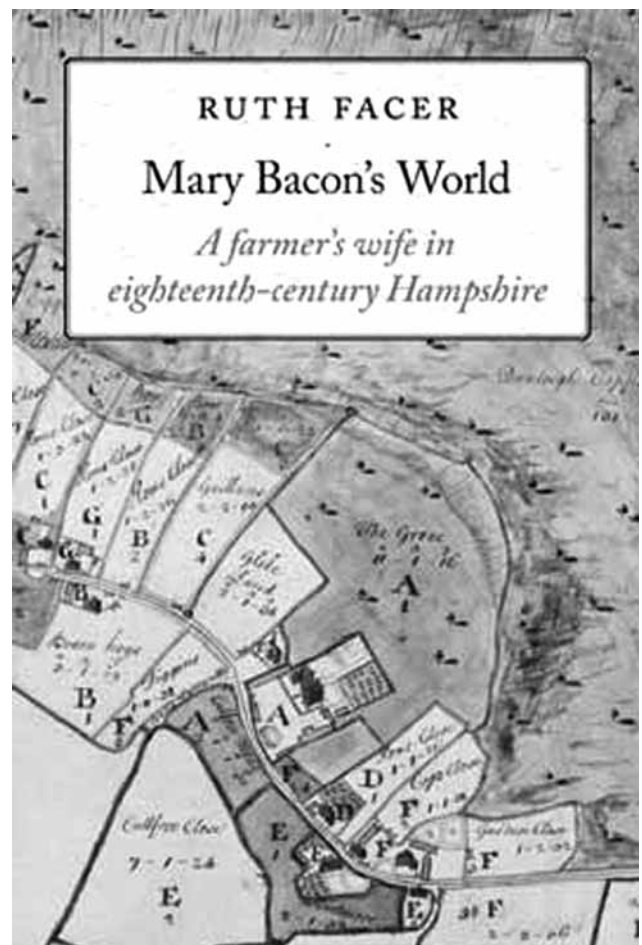


The presentation of fiction through provincial newspapers is an area of scholarly research which has been largely ignored, surprising in an age of increasing interest in the history of reading, yet there is much to learn from such a study. There are many questions waiting to be answered both in terms of providers and recipients. How, for example, did social and commercial conditions govern the transmission of the novel from publisher, or bookseller, to newspaper proprietor or editor and finally to the provincial reader? Was there a difference in the way in which novels were advertised in a London paper and in the provinces? Were the same writers advertised in both and if they were not, what were the reasons? A new, bibliographical resource on the Chawton House Library website entitled *Fiction in the Hampshire Chronicle, 1772-1829* by Ruth Facer discusses areas for further research and provides a database of weekly entries of fiction throughout the period as a tool for scholars to pursue and possibly begin to answer some of the questions proposed.

The years under review are from 1772 when the newspaper commenced publication, to 1829, the end of the Romantic period. During this time the paper covered a very wide area ranging from Devon in the west, the Channel Islands in the south and Berkshire in the north. The study is divided into two sections, an Introduction (Section 1) followed by an easily accessible database of all novels presented in the newspaper, in advertisements or otherwise, on a weekly basis (Section 2). Some non-fiction titles are included in order to give a general indication of background reading at the time and some brief historical pointers are taken from the text of the newspaper in order to set the fiction in context. Advertisements for some titles are given in full as examples of how booksellers/

publishers promoted their titles. Also included is a bookseller's view of what constituted a good novel and some bookseller's statements published in the newspaper, indicating which aspects of book production were of particular importance. As names of authors are sometimes omitted, titles are inaccurate, editions are not always indicated and books were often advertised before publication making the date unreliable, each work of fiction has been referenced using both the British Library Integrated Catalogue and the COPAC integrated catalogue of holdings at academic, national and independent research libraries.

Presentation of fiction other than through advertisements is rare in the *Hampshire Chronicle*, but the paper did publish three very short stories of a moral nature. As these are unusual and no other source for them has been found, the three stories are included in full. Three further appendices conclude the study. The first offers an alphabetical list of 350 authors with titles and a further 120 anonymous authors with titles in the database. The second is a list of 700 titles with their authors and the third is a list of publishers/booksellers advertising in the newspaper. Apart from a few exceptions, only London publishers are listed.



EDWARD AUSTEN'S SUIT

By Sarah Parry, Education Officer

During 2011 some visitors to Chawton House Library had the opportunity to see a gentleman's green, silk suit displayed beside the portrait of Edward Austen (later Knight) in the Dining Room. These garments are a fine example of a coat and breeches of the late eighteenth century and are said to have belonged to Jane Austen's brother, Edward, and have been in the Knight family since the 1790s. Through the generosity of Richard Knight and the Knight family the suit has been loaned to Chawton House Library.

The suit was in good condition considering its age and the vulnerability of textiles to environmental factors such as light, handling and the natural decay of the fabric and other elements used in the construction. In order to display the suit in a meaningful manner interventive conservation was required and fundraising was instigated to support this. In the meantime, the suit was stabilised and we received a very generous anonymous donation that allowed this work to be carried out. Louise Squire, the Textile Conservator who worked with us to conserve the suit, carried out this work enabling the suit to be occasionally shown flat in a display cabinet and allowing us to explain to visitors how we wished to conserve the suit in the long term. We later received a grant from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and this enabled the main interventive conservation work to take place.

Interventive conservation on an object adds limited material, as discretely as possible, to enhance the preservation of the object whilst still maintaining its integrity. Any work carried out

must be reversible should any of the conservation work need to be removed in the future. When interventive conservation is complete, the object looks as though very little has been done; in reality a huge amount of skilled and time-consuming work has been carried out. For the suit, this work included putting the coat and breeches on a conservation standard dummy so that it can now be displayed in a more naturalistic way. Another gain is that the suit is now able to support its own weight without causing undue stress to the fabric at the shoulders of the coat. It is now possible to see the cut of the clothes and how they would have looked when worn. This interpretive information was lost when the suit was displayed flat.

On several occasions this year the suit has been displayed in the Dining Room beside the portrait of Edward Austen. Although the suit is not the one shown in the portrait it still gives an immediacy and physicality to have the suit and the portrait displayed together. A long-term plan is to have a copy of the suit made for the use of school and student groups to Chawton House Library. In addition to seeing the costume in the portrait and an example of a suit said to have belonged to Edward, students will also be able to try on the facsimile coat and feel for themselves how tightly the garment fitted.

The next stage is to fundraise for a museum standard display case. We have already received a generous donation towards this work from a member of the Jane Austen Society of North America and we look forward to having the suit on permanent display so that it can be enjoyed by all visitors to Chawton House Library.



Portrait of Edward Austen in the Dining Room at Chawton, with his green silk suit.

JANE AUSTEN AND CHAWTON HOUSE LIBRARY – A NEW PATRON'S VIEW

By Deirdre Le Faye

I have recently become a Patron of Chawton House Library, an appointment which leads me to ponder on the work of the Library and how its existence can benefit current and future scholars, not only in this country but indeed from all over the world. As regular readers of *The Female Spectator* will know, CHL was set up to promote research into the lives of women writing in English during the 16th to mid-19th centuries, and to study the works produced by them in those years. The Library is therefore unique in its very precise specialization – this combination of authoresses-only and a limited time-frame, and its collecting policy has included the acquisition of many items of what even some C18 readers themselves used to condemn as ‘the mere trash of the circulating library’, since very few copies of such texts now exist elsewhere.

Foremost amongst the authoresses whose lives and publications fall within the scope of Chawton House Library's aims, is of course Jane Austen—who could indeed be viewed as the patron saint of the Library rather than one of its subjects. For me in particular the life and times of Jane Austen and her family have become the main topic of my researches, carried out for the last forty years or so; researches which have enabled me to publish the new/third edition of her *Letters* (1995), the definitive factual biography *Jane Austen, A Family Record* (2nd edn 2004), the small biography *Jane Austen's 'Outlandish Cousin', the life and letters of Eliza de Feuillide* (2002), the more generalized *Jane Austen, the World of her Novels* (2002)—in which I trace the social history and possible geographical locations behind the creation of her works—as well as several other smaller publications, and culminating in *A Chronology of Jane Austen and her Family 1600-2000* (2006), a compilation of some 15,000 documented facts; and the Fourth Edition of her *Letters* is due to appear before the end of this year. No new letters have come to light, alas, since 1995; but corrections and updatings have been made, and a new Subject Index created, which should I hope be very useful to all readers and scholars.

However, there are still outstanding many possible tasks for future Austen scholars: one would be to read and comment on every book Austen mentions in her letters and novels, as well as those listed by Isabella in *Northanger Abbey*. There are others such as Mme de Montolieu's *Caroline de Lichfield* which, according to the diary of her niece Fanny Knight, Jane Austen was reading in Southampton in 1807. Many of these works are now housed in Chawton House Library. Some, such as those by Burney and Edgeworth, have remained classics, though nowadays they are read only by university students and literary critics, and are no longer the household names they were in Austen's day.

Then more consideration could be given to attempting to trace the books which she might have read in her youth while living in Steventon; in Letters Nos. 30 and 31, for example, Jane refers to the list of the Revd George Austen's books being made by Martha Lloyd and herself—‘Martha & I work at the books every day ... My father has got above 500 Volumes to dispose of ...’ Their manuscripts do not survive, but a search of subscription lists might throw up unexpected results, such as Jefferson's *Sermons*, to which the Knights and the Austens both subscribed (see Letters Nos. 52 and 54), and for which Cassandra solicited subscriptions from their Southampton friends and relations. Chawton House Library possesses another fruitful source of research, the 1818 catalogue of Edward Knight's library at Godmersham; however, it must be borne

in mind that although Jane Austen could have read any of these books, there is nothing to suggest that she did read any or all of them, nor that she had sufficient classical learning to attempt any of the Latin and Greek texts. Apart from Edward's library, his wife Elizabeth owned a copy of Mary Hays's *Female Biography; or Memoirs of Illustrious and Celebrated Women of All Ages and Countries*, given to her on 27th December 1805 by her eldest son Edward junior (which was acquired by a book dealer in 2006 and seems to be as yet unsold), a title much more likely to have interested Jane during her later visits to Godmersham.



Deirdre Le Faye

Another task would be to search memoirs, biographies and autobiographies from the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century, for mentions of the Austen family in general and Jane Austen's novels in particular; here again CHL can provide starting points from their holdings of this type of work. Mary Russell Mitford, for example, in her autobiographical writings, makes several mentions of Jane and her novels, including the now famous comment that Miss Mitford's mother thought Jane was 'the prettiest, silliest, most affected, husband-hunting butterfly she ever remembered' – a remark which horrified James Edward Austen-Leigh and his sisters when they read it in 1869, just as he was finishing his text for the *Memoir* of his aunt; but which nowadays we appreciate as showing Jane's natural cheerfulness and attractive personality, and hence consider rather as a compliment.

Chawton House Library also aims to broaden its base by including acquisitions or deposits of unpublished archives written by women – diaries, journals, letters and possibly even texts by would-be novelists – in order to provide a home for manuscripts which are perhaps either anonymous or else without any particular topographical basis which would make them of interest to some County Record Office; and as for the published works suggested above, all such archives should be

studied to see if there is any mention of Austen and her works. Fanny Knight's diaries are already in the Centre for Kentish Studies in Maidstone, as is the Godmersham part of the Knight archive; but the diaries of James Austen's wife, Mary Lloyd, and of the Austens' friend Mrs Chute of The Vyne, are in the Hampshire Record Office, and require further study. It may feel like the proverbial hunting for needles in haystacks, but if no new research is ever carried out, then no new facts will ever be discovered. As another example, the Austens' friend Mrs Bramston of Oakley Hall at Deane mentions in a letter to a kinswoman that the Austens were flooded out in their Steventon parsonage by a sudden thaw in March 1795 – which is before Austen's own letters begin and therefore a hitherto unknown fact. In 1806 the Leigh family lawyer, Mr Hill, met Jane and Cassandra when they were visiting Stoneleigh, and afterwards wrote to their cousin Revd Edward Cooper of Hamstall Ridware: 'My Wife & I were happy to have had the Pleasure of meeting the Miss Austens they are very sensible elegant Young Women & of the very best Dispositions.' This is perhaps no more than tactful politeness from a lawyer to a wealthy client, but all the same, it adds another small piece to the jigsaw of Jane Austen's peaceful and almost unrecorded life.

LITERARY AND LITERAL LANDSCAPES

By Eleanor Marsden

With a book in your hand, you can leaf through its pages; its spine can flex. If left, it can disintegrate and decompose. It can attract literal and metaphorical book worms. You can lose yourself in a book, as in a wilderness; books can be devoured; books can be digested. The very organic nature of a book's materials links it straight back to the landscape and nature. In short, I have been thinking about the link between our collections and the Chawton estate; literary and literal landscapes, if you will.

Both are being transformed by work here at Chawton House Library. A Fellows' lecture over the summer referred to 'manuring' as a metaphor for intellectual cultivation, and served to reinforce that the natural world has long had a relationship with the intellectual. There have, in fact, been many reminders of this relationship here at the Library: from Chapterhouse's recent performance of *'Sense and Sensibility'* in the grounds themselves, to the emerging barn and its place within our education programme.

This serves to highlight that the land and the house – and the collections held within – share an underlying bond which only strengthens, rather than weakens, under scrutiny. I think it is no

coincidence, either, that many funders supporting environmental conservation also include heritage and historical preservation within their aims. These are very intimately connected.

2012 will see a strengthening of these inter-related connections between all aspects of the Library, and will disseminate information about how the pieces of the jigsaw fit together to a far wider audience. So, I would suggest that if you are a supporter of the collections, you are also a supporter of the estate work – although you may not consciously believe so at first thought. Growth in one area of the charity's mission impacts positively on the others, and all areas contribute to the unique operations of the Library as a whole.

Therefore, if you are looking for a meaningful Christmas gift, do please think about supporting the charity via the 'Buy a Book' scheme – an unusual and personal gift. (See the website or phone for details.) Highlights from the shop are also online, and shoppers can use our website links to online marketplaces for other purchases, supporting us in the process. Please help us to nurture the remarkable and evolving landscapes here at Chawton House Library in whatever way you can.

NORTH MEETS SOUTH: WOMEN'S TRAVEL NARRATIVES AT CHAWTON HOUSE LIBRARY

By Isabelle Baudino

Isabelle Baudino teaches at the École Normale Supérieure de Lyon in France and was a Visiting Fellow at Chawton House Library in 2010.

I came to Chawton House Library because I had been invited to work on a challenging project about the gendering of art-historical discourse in eighteenth-century Europe. Inspired by Stephen Bending's and Stephen Bygrave's publication in 2007, *Women's Travel Writings in Revolutionary France*,¹ I intended to focus upon travel narratives written by British women of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in order to delimit the perceptions British women might have had, not of France's political evolution, but of its artistic transformation over that troubled period. I was primarily interested in accounts of Paris and of the Parisian sights, i.e. galleries, collections, and palaces, as well as the museum set up in the Louvre. In keeping with the masterly volume published by Paula Findlen, Wendy W. Roworth and Catherine M. Sama,² I set out with the intention to study women as new participants in the cultural institution which the Grand Tour had become, concentrating more specifically on how women's continental travels, and their taking part in a wide-ranging cultural experience, prompted them to articulate views on works of art and artistic matters.

When I opened the first volumes carefully laid out for me on a table in the quiet reading room overlooking the gardens at Chawton House, I felt doubtful about my choice of sources. Indeed although the 1770s were a real watershed for women's writing, most of the travel writers I dealt with – whether amateur or professional writers – felt the need to engage in preliminary exercises of self-denial of authorship and authority. The stock-in-trade rhetoric of advertisements and dedications consisted of explaining that these writings were originally confined to the private sphere (i.e. written by women for their female friends or family) and that it was only upon the advice of some (preferably male!) experts that the authoresses had yielded to give them to the public. The necessity of male tutelage to publicize

female views appeared again and again in prefaces and forewords and so did the repeated use of self-demeaning vocabulary. The adjective 'trifling', for instance, was used by Marianne Baillie, Jane Carey, Anne Carter and Marianne Colston to describe their writings, thus hinting at their frivolous, and possibly false nature, rather than at the quality and trustworthiness of their observations.

As the days went by, library sessions alternated with discussions with fellow visitors around the kitchen table in the inspirational Old Stables. Conversations in the dim autumn light, with colleagues coming from the Australian summer, encouraged me to listen more carefully to women who had travelled in the eighteenth century. The emphasis on the trivial nature of their literary endeavours can be considered in all its gendered dimension when contrasted with their need to assert and substantiate the genuineness of texts which were all written in the first person. The contradictory demands which operated upon eighteenth-century female authors, who were caught between the discourses on femininity on the one hand and their creative aspirations on the other, applied even more forcefully to

women who were writing about their experience as travellers. The same contradictions are woven into their artistic assessments. While following the classic Grand Tour itinerary, they were not shy in expressing personal sentiments, likings and points of view. As they followed well-trodden paths, women did not hesitate to make artistic comments, some more vocally than others. Anna Riggs Miller stands out as being the most ambitious writer on art of the period since she openly states her intention to compile a guide for the use of all British travellers. Although she complies with some gendered constraints on literary production when she hides behind (relative) anonymity and presents her artistic guidebook in the form of

letters addressed to her mother, she produces an impressive summary on Italian art in which she discusses the descriptions, interpretations and even attributions made by such renowned experts as Joseph Addison or Charles-Nicolas Cochin.

The reliance on previous (mostly male) travellers' artistic accounts cannot disqualify women as writers, since travel narrative as a genre thrived on a complex system of cross-references, quotes and borrowings. Despite varying levels of expertise, British women travellers displayed a remarkable willingness to engage in art-historical statements,



Portrait of Anne Plumtre from her Narrative of a Residence in Ireland during the Summer of 1814

1 Stephen Bending et Stephen Bygrave, *Women's Travel Writings in Revolutionary France* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2007).

2 Paula Findlen, Wendy W. Roworth, Catherine M. Sama, *Italy's Eighteenth Century. Gender and Culture in the Age of the Grand Tour* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009).

identifying individual works of art and using appropriate categories to analyse them, sometimes even against their wider historical context. Whereas the question of girls' and women's education was being debated in Enlightenment Europe, travel narratives as loose literary forms, deemed more factual and less erudite than other publications, provided a de-territorialized space, where women could express their longing for knowledge. While women artists had been excluded from life classes in art academies throughout Europe, and thus barred from accessing the liberal status and autonomy much sought after by their male counterparts, the sheer achievement of women travellers who explored art criticism and art history is even more obvious when one bears in mind that these had been male strongholds for centuries.



Frontispiece entitled 'Swiss Cottage' from Marianne Baillie's *First Impressions on a Tour upon the Continent in the Summer of 1818*

Travel narratives created discursive spaces where women could break away from some social constraints which were out of place. The creation of this critical distance explains the daring stands some of them were able to take. On her way to Paris, Frances Jane Carey stopped off at Bayeux, an English *lieu de mémoire* since it is the home of the so-called 'Bayeux tapestry', the embroidered depiction of the events which led up to the Norman conquest of England. Unaware that the work had been moved away from the cathedral to the 'hôtel de ville', Carey actually failed to see it. When telling her readers about this missed opportunity, she refers to the 'Bayeux tapestry' as 'this rare piece of *workwoman'ship*'. For all her antiquarian perspective, she forges this amazing neologism and points at the inadequacy of language to account for the female identity of the authoress(es) of this particular work of art. The contradictory demands imposed upon women who authored art-historical statements, and more specifically the necessity to abide by the hierarchy of genres which placed history paintings and painters at the top, deprived them of the intellectual means to improve the haphazard discussion of women's artistic achievements. Yet the coining of new words, as well the promotion of new role models, demonstrate that women had not only crossed geographical boundaries but had started on the road to autonomy. Anne Plumptre provides an interesting case in point in her account of her visit to the Louvre when she praises the beauty of the statue known as 'Diana of Versailles'. Not only does she stand up for this 'Artemis of the Chase', as it was also called, but she compares it favourably to the Apollo Belvedere, thus differentiating herself from generations of connoisseurs. The fierce goddess, who embodies the resistance to male domination,

can be seen as a mirror image of Plumptre herself, casting the latter's critical distance in a heroic light.

As my colleagues and I heroically waded our way through record snowfalls at Chawton, I revelled in Plumptre's evocation of my native sunny Provence. Musing from the highest point in Marseilles, she once again challenges canonical artistic assessments when she suggests that landscape painters should turn their attention to this glorious rooftop view. By promoting the artistic potential of Marseilles, she is proving that women could admire new objects and could even aim at connoisseurship since she is assuming the role of an art patron. This changing of scenery epitomizes how travel writing led women to engage in literary and artistic activities.

LIST OF TRAVEL NARRATIVES CITED

Marianne Baillie. *First Impressions on a Tour upon the Continent in the Summer of 1818 through Parts of France, Italy, Switzerland, the Borders of Germany and a Part of French Flanders*. London: Murray, 1819.

Frances Jane Carey. *Journal of a Tour in France in the Years 1816 and 1817*. London: Taylor and Hessey, 1823.

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Marianne Colston. *Journal of a Tour in France, Switzerland, and Italy, During the Years 1819, 20, and 21*. Illustrated by Fifty Lithographic Prints, From Original Drawings Taken in Italy, the Alps, and the Pyrenees. Paris: Galignani, 1822.

Anon. [Anna Riggs Miller]. *Letters from Italy, Describing the Manners, Customs, Antiquities, Paintings &c. of that Country, in the Years 1770 and 1771, to a Friend Residing in France, by an English Woman*. Second Edition. London: Dilly, 1777.

Anne Plumptre. *A Narrative of A Three Years' Residence in France, Principally in the Southern Departments, from the Year 1802 to 1805: Including Some Authentic Particulars Respecting the Early Life of the French Emperor, and a General Inquiry into his Character*. 3 vols. London: Mawman, Ridgeway, Clarke, Crosby and Constable, 1810.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Tuesday 6th December - Evening Lecture

Writing Eighteenth-Century Welsh Women's Literary History.

Dr Sarah Prescott, University of Aberystwyth, explores a range of Anglophone Welsh women writers from the eighteenth century.

17th & 18th December

Montagu Knight's Edwardian Christmas

Open house with Edwardian-style Christmas decorations and staff in period costume. Traditional fare, including mulled wine and mead, storytelling for children and St Nicholas himself making an appearance, and other seasonal pleasures await. Gift shop open.

10 am - 3 pm. Tickets: £4 Adults, £1 Children

Thursday 16th February 2012

Chawton House Library Evening Lecture

Professor Gill Perry (The Open University)

The First Actresses: Portraiture and the 'Feminine Face' of Eighteenth-Century Celebrity Culture

All evening lectures and talks begin with a wine reception and canapés at 6.30 and the lectures begin at 7.00 pm. Tickets: £10.00 (£7.50 for Friends and students). Tickets for other events may be priced differently. To book tickets for any of the above events please telephone Corrine Saint on 01420-541010 or email: info@chawton.net

24th-25th February 2012

Novel Approaches: The Language of Women's Fiction, 1750-1830.

A conference at Chawton House Library, Hampshire

Keynote speakers:

Prof. Sylvia Adamson (Emeritus Professor, University of Sheffield, UK); Dr. Joe Bray (University of Sheffield, UK) Prof. Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade (Leiden University, The Netherlands)

For more information about confirmed speakers, and to register, please follow the link: <http://www.languageapproachesatchawton.co.uk/Default.aspx>

MERRY CHRISTMAS

From All at Chawton House Library

*Stephen Lawrence
and all the staff at
Chawton House Library
wish you a very
Happy Christmas
and joyous New Year.*

This integrated card saves paper and reduces the charity's printing and postage costs.

Detail of opera dress and ball gown, *The Ladies' museum, new and improved series. Under the especial patronage of Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Kent.* (1832). London: Simpkin and Marshall, Stationers' Court; and G. G. Bennis, Paris. From the collection at Chawton House Library.

