

The Female Spectator

CHAWTON HOUSE LIBRARY

VOL. 1 NO. 1 FALL 1995

CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF EARLY ENGLISH WOMEN'S WRITING



Chawton House

This is the inaugural issue of *The Female Spectator*, the newsletter of the Centre for the Study of Early English Women's Writing. The Centre, to be located in Chawton, England, seeks to provide a self-contained research area and library for the study of the works of early English women writers (1600-1830). The Centre has been established under the auspices of the Leonard X. Bosack and Bette M. Kruger Charitable Foundation, founded through the generosity of Sandy Lerner and Leonard Bosack.

A LETTER TO FRIENDS OF THE CENTRE

Dear Friends of the Centre for the Study of Early English Women's Writing and the Chawton House Library:

I am just returning from yet another trip to England and thought this might be a good time to start our newsletter tradition. There are a number of individuals ready and willing to share their thoughts and experiences regarding Chawton and our objectives.

There has been very real progress this past year for the Study Centre. It might make sense to add a little history here, as given by an ignorant and partial historian. N.B. There will be very few dates.

On June 9, 1994, the English branch of the Leonard X. Bosack and Bette M. Kruger Foundation finally completed the purchase of Chawton House and its surrounding properties. We actually started negotiating for the purchase of Chawton House in October 1992, immediately following the Jane Austen Society of North America (JASNA) meeting in Santa Monica, California. We agreed upon a price the next month, but much to the delight of the British

legal profession, the next year-and-a-half was spent hammering out leases, boundaries, tenancy and other sundry issues.

The British Press had a field day when we Janeites were allowed a second chance at Chawton House, owing to the collapse of the hotel and golf course project. As soon as I recover from the shock of the legal fees, I will try to learn to laugh at the press clippings. In the meantime, I will shew how well-bred I am by believing that too little cannot be said on the subject.

By September 1993, things had settled down to such a dull roar in Chawton Village that Kit Kaufman, a Trustee of the Founda-

tion and its solicitor, and I ventured to attend a town meeting at the Chawton Parish Town Hall. I was pleasantly surprised to find that the press had not obtruded as much on public opinion as I had feared, and most of the questions asked were about our plans for the houses (Chawton House and the Old Manor) and the Study Centre, and related issues such as parking and traffic. The villagers seemed relieved to know that Chawton House was in sympathetic hands at last. We were assisted immeasurably toward this end by Robin and Juliet Auburn, the caretakers of Chawton House. They have elected to stay on with us and hold things together, including substantial bits of the house (like its roof), during this interesting time.



Photo by Julian Herbert, Times Newspapers Ltd

Sandy Lerner in front of the Elizabethan wing of Chawton House.

During September 1994, a number of people chose to cast their lot with the Study Centre. They include Richard Knight, the direct descendant of Edward Knight and the freeholder of Chawton House and its 270 acres of park and farmlands, and Gilly Drummond, President of the Hampshire Gardens Society. Richard Knight has been a great help and given us access to innumerable objects and papers relating to the House. Gilly Drummond has proven to be an indefatigable ally and consummate diplomat, as we wind our way through the labyrinthine (or should I say Byzantine?) process of preparing for the restoration of the House and grounds.

Kit and I returned again in July 1994 to attend the annual U. K. meeting of the Jane Austen Society, chaired by Richard Knight, and the annual Chawton Village Summer Fête that same evening, both held at Chawton House. We demonstrated true American entrepreneurship by selling all the raffle tickets to benefit St. Nicholas Church (with help from Richard Knight's charming sons and daughter). In fact, we sold some tickets more than once. Yours truly got as close to being Vanna White as she ever will by handing out the raffle prizes, which included several rather large, dead fish, attached to rather small bottles of wine. You may rest assured that this was all a very new experience for me. There is definitely a knack to this Lady-of-the-Manor thing, and I can't seem to find the user's manual.

Kit and I attempted to sort out how we were actually going to start the process of starting the process. In England, historically important buildings are listed and require an extensive approval process for every amendment, no matter how necessary or trivial. Chawton House is a Grade II-A listed building, meaning that any change to the interior or exterior of the house requires a detailed plan that must be submitted to and approved by innumerable government agencies and historical societies. As you might guess, Americans are not particularly knowledgeable about this sort of thing, and Gilly Drummond and Richard Knight have been truly a blessing, giving us huge quantities of time and energy in their extremely tactful and elegant way. Since then, we have been deluged by resumes from architects to wheelwrights, all wanting to be a part of the action. It still boggles my mind that anything associated with early women's writing is creating such a fuss, but there it is.

So, one year later, I am back at Chawton and very pleased to report that we have made definite progress. Gilly Drummond has graciously volunteered to take on the landscaping direction. Richard Knight is heading up the work on the farmlands, and Isobel Grundy has agreed to direct our Library and the academic plan for the Centre. All of the above individuals, Kit Kaufman, and I, sit on the Chawton House Executive Committee and will direct the various volunteers, consultants, employees, and contractors who will be hired to restore the House and grounds for the placement of the Study Centre and Library.

We have also hired a permanent Project Director, who will have responsibility for coordinating the restoration efforts of the project areas and will report to the Executive Committee. We tried out



Sandy Lerner with Emma, born to her Shire mare, Jane, on New Year's Day in Hampshire, near Chawton.

our team by repairing the major holes in the roof and have also started gathering information on the physical condition of the House and its history. The Executive Committee will meet at least quarterly at Chawton. Please feel free to direct all your fine ideas and suggestions to the appropriate Committee member.

The Chawton House Library Report, including the book and novel count, our progress on the computer and cataloguing fronts, and other issues of note, has been prepared by the informed. You may reach them, alias Julia Hüot and Anne Blenman Hare, at chawton@aol.com. The Acting Director of the Study Centre is Susan Maher, Susan.Maher@forsythe.stanford.edu.

I will mention, briefly, that we are currently working with St. Anne's College and the Bodleian Library at Oxford on various issues relating to an academic liaison with the Study Centre, and on various cataloguing and other issues relating to rare books and special collections. We have a consultant, Michael Ward, who is assisting us with our research into the digitization and optical scanning of the novels.

However, I can't possibly close without letting you all know that my Shire mare, Deighton Starlight "Jane," has settled very comfortably in the U. S., after spending much time in Hampshire, near Chawton, where she came safely through her lying-in. She is the equine equal of Jane Bennet in beauty and temper, and I received my best New Year's present ever when Jane presented me with Nonsuch Starlight's "Emma" at 10.5 stone and 11.5 hands

(147 pounds, and 44.5" tall at the shoulder). My heart was set on a Miss Emma, who I hope will live at least twenty-one years in the world with very little to vex or distress her. Jane and Emma are "at home" with Uncles Izzzy and Ben (my Shire geldings) in California.

I look forward to writing again.

Yours most truly,

Sandy Lerner



PROGRESS AT CHAWTON

by

Susan Maher

It is a great pleasure to be serving as the Centre's Acting Director during this initial period. It is also frustrating, exciting, anxiety-making, and confusing! However, we are beginning to make progress, and I am delighted to be able to share some of the news with our friends.

The Centre now has a Project Director for phase one of the project. His name is Adrian Thatcher, and he is a Hampshire native with twenty years' experience in the construction business, including work on rated buildings. He has commissioned a well-known local architectural historian, Edward Roberts, to research and prepare a report on the Old Manor and the roof line of Chawton

House. The preliminary reports are in, and they begin to answer a number of important questions about the buildings, including when additions were built, the age of the beams in the Old Manor, and whether the buildings were ever moated. We will be keeping you informed as we learn more about the houses and the land. We have learned that the site is a very old one, and has had a number of manor houses built on it since the twelfth century. In fact, a family in the village, while doing some renovation on their home, which is the oldest building in Chawton and dates from the fourteenth century, uncovered a wall painting from that period in the dining room! Discoveries such as these are very exciting, but can also be very costly in time.

The Centre has also enlisted the services of Sybil Wade, a landscape architect who has been researching gardens and farmland in the U. K. for more than twenty years. She is preparing a report on the lands and gardens around the property, and we expect to begin work as soon as weather permits. In addition, Christopher Currie will be reporting on the very earliest uses of the land around Chawton House. We are extremely lucky to have contracted with Cassandra Knight, also a landscape architect and the daughter of Richard and Anna Knight who own the freehold on Chawton House, to begin work on several of the smaller gardens.

In the meantime, I would like to say "thank you" to all who have expressed their enthusiasm and support for this project. It is a pity that Chawton House is unable to accommodate your requests to visit and stroll the grounds. The house and grounds have been neglected for too long, and are simply not safe. I hope to be able to give a far different report in upcoming newsletters.



CHAWTON HOUSE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF EARLY ENGLISH WOMEN'S WRITING

Mrs. Gilly Drummond D. L., Director of Landscape Restoration
Professor Isobel Grundy, Director of the Library and Academic Liaison
Mr. Christopher L. Kaufman, Esq., Solicitor for the Centre
Mr. Richard Knight, Director of Farmlands Restoration
Ms. Sandy Lerner, Director of Technology Resources
Ms. Susan Maher, Acting Director of the Study Centre, ex officio
Mr. Adrian Thatcher, Project Director, ex officio

CHAWTON HOUSE LIBRARY: FROM OUR PAST TO THE FUTURE

by

Isobel Grundy

The Female Spectator

A Tribute to Eliza Haywood's Original *Spectator* (1744-46)

This newsletter will be the voice for Chawton House, its Library, and the Centre for the Study of Early English Women's Writing. I would like to give some idea here of our hopes and dreams for the Library, the academic plan, and the scholarship which the Centre will make possible.

The debate we have had over a name for the newsletter reflects the terms in which we think. We began with the idea of precedent, of turning up something produced by women as much as two centuries ago or more, and then referring to that, bettering it, or extending it. The first name we thought of was *The Female Spectator*, which was the one Eliza Haywood gave to the periodical she ran from 1744 to 1746. The original *Female Spectator* had a tendency to didacticism (it belonged to the second half of Haywood's career, when in accordance with the changing spirit of the age she became less feisty and more moralistic). But it had the liveliness of all Haywood's work; it included plenty of fiction, and it aimed to increase the range of women's interests in books, human society, and the natural world.

Then we had to consider *The Female Tatler*. The original work appeared just before Haywood launched her career, in 1709-10. It was an almost instant response to Richard Steele's *Tatler* and its frequent condescension toward women. Its authors are still not unmasked, though the actuality behind its "Mrs. Crackenthorpe, a Lady that knows every thing," may quite likely have been Delarivier Manley. But our Centre is centered on Jane Austen, and a lifetime divides *The Female Tatler* from her birth. The connection seemed not quite close enough.

Another name that cropped up was that of *The Loiterer*, a periodical run by Jane Austen's brothers in their student days. It has received scholarly attention recently, not for the sake of its undergraduate creators, but for their little sister's possible contributions to it. But *The Female Loiterer* might give quite the wrong impression of idleness and dilettantism.

Sandy Lerner particularly liked the idea conveyed by *The Female Spectator*, that of women sitting on the sidelines watching intently, although they were excluded from the game. So here we are. We trust that the shade of Eliza Haywood will wish us well.



The frontispiece and title page to the bound volumes of *The Female Spectator*, third edition. The picture which Eliza Haywood herself

A lot of intellectual spectating is done through the medium of books. Students of Jane Austen have no difficulty locating many of the books she read, from the Bible to the original *Spectator* written by Addison and Steele, and from Pope and Johnson to William Cowper and Byron. These are accessible through any college or university library. It is even true today that such libraries will have the novels by Frances Burney and Maria Edgeworth, which Austen cites in her famous defense of her fellow novelists in *Northanger Abbey*. Even the "horrid" novels which Isabella Thorpe admires were reprinted in the 1960s, especially because of Austen's having accorded them the doubtful honor of her attention.

Critics like Dale Spender and Joanna Russ have written about the attempt to stifle and silence women's writing. I don't think

actual conspiracy theory is in order here. No one said, "Let's suppress women's writing"! But lots of reviewers said, "Here's another book by another woman; of course, like all the others, it isn't really very good." Sometimes they said, as in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, "women can't write, women can't paint." Sometimes they simply said, "women tend not to write as well as men." But every book born into the literary marketplace has to struggle for survival. Most readers choose books on someone's recommendation. Most readers are diffident about their own opinions; critics with loud, confident voices wield a disproportionate amount of power. Female authorship has usually been a fairly severe handicap in whether or not any particular title gets taken up and read, becomes famous, and then finally preserved. Genres like the novel, which have become particularly connected with the idea of the female experience, have always lost status and respect.

The result has been that standard literary historians have perhaps innocently and ignorantly, but with no suspicion of their own inadequacy, written that at one period or another there was no women's writing, or no women's writing that was any good. This has happened time and again. When the printing presses were freed from restriction at the time of the English Civil War, dozens of sectarian women rushed their radical political and theological ideas into print. By the end of the century they were forgotten as if they had never existed. As they were disappearing from sight, a whole generation of women playwrights, in the wake of Aphra Behn, were providing the stage with its pressing needs: bloodthirsty tragedy and sexy comedy. Among the comic dramatists, Susanna Centlivre had a light and popular touch that kept her works in the living repertory through Austen's lifetime and well beyond, but to look at any drama syllabus today one would never imagine it.

Before Austen began to write, generation after generation of women novelists had occupied the limelight, been read, discussed and admired, but each was forgotten by the time the next generation had settled itself, and well before the books of literary history came to be written. Behn and Manley, and Haywood in her earlier phase, were too full of sex and violence for the succeeding generations. Sarah Fielding and Charlotte Lennox were eclipsed from the very beginning by their male contemporaries, Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson. And so on. Austen was not the first woman writer, not the first good woman writer, not the first this and not the first that; but she was the first to hold on to her place in the mainstream once she had got it. This fact alone should be enough to make people who love Austen interested in the relation between her and the female contemporaries and predecessors whom she so assiduously read.

What can you do with your interest in Mary Brunton, Laetitia-Matilda Hawkins and Rachel Hunter, all of whose works Austen mentions with a mixture of respect and gleeful scorn? What about the women novelists whom, in their turn, Brunton, Hawkins and Hunter were building on or taking issue with in print? You can read them if you happen to live within reach of and have access to a research library such as Harvard, UCLA, the Bodleian or the British Library.

Mary) THE Deekham

FEMALE
SPECTATOR.

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M,DCC,L.

used of her editorial team. In reality she may have had fewer helpers, or even done all the work on her own.

Or, at least, you can read many of them. Even the English copy-right libraries, it turns out, which were supposed to receive from publishers a copy of every book printed in the country, really couldn't face being bothered with all those novels. There was a kind of tacit agreement between the publishers and the librarians not to offer and not to ask for copies of those kinds of books which would be least likely to interest a serious-minded academic library. This self-selecting process weeded out much fiction, especially fiction by women, and especially fiction by women who were just beginning their writing careers or who had given evidence of being "merely" popular. So Hannah More's rigorously didactic *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (the book which caused Austen to write, "pictures of perfection make me sick and wicked") would be sure of a place on the shelves, but the "horror" novels would not. Neither would one find early books of a novelist who only became successful later, nor the work of even a supremely gifted writer who failed to produce a developing career and a coherent *oeuvre*.

Just as it was normal outside the field of literature for a man to have a career, but unheard of for a woman to have one, so among authors a man was likely to think in career terms. A woman was expected to see her writing as a hobby (not to be put in competition with her serious duties as wife, mother, daughter or sister) or forced to see it first and foremost as a struggle for "subsistence" or survival. Generally it proved impossible in the long run to make a living by writing; and books written in the effort to scrape together a living, like books written as a hobby, were not likely to meet with the respect reserved for the "literary."

Suppose you want to read *all* the works of one of those literary mothers about whom Austen expressed such complicated feelings? Or to read one of Isabella Thorpe's favorites *all through*? Or to follow your ideas freely and unpredictably from one novel to another among the works of Austen and her female contemporaries? Although the answer would be different in every case, the search for the books themselves would likely exclude any possibility of spontaneity, of being able to follow a new interest as it springs up before you — an essential element of scholarly research. It would probably involve at least one of the following painful experiences: asking interlibrary loan for books which are then refused as being too fragile to travel; applying for grants to travel here, there, and everywhere; or reading whole long novels, in tiny print, on microfilm machines (in fact, novels don't get filmed to the same extent as poems and plays, because it is known that reading on microfilm is quite unpleasant.)

Because surviving copies of these works are so widely scattered, it has not been possible to compile a complete catalogue, or a selective or annotated one as a guide to rediscovered "lost" novels, novels worthy of some excitement. It would be highly desirable to establish a collection and catalogue with the information necessary to assist any scholar's research into early women's writing.

And so, the Chawton House Library. In this historic setting, larger and grander than anywhere Austen lived herself, but intimately familiar to her as her brother's house, and accurately reflecting the milieu of many of her characters, books are being collected to embody the female half of Jane Austen's tradition.



Eliza Haywood's portrait. Photograph by courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

She did not, of course, endorse divisions by gender. Henry Tilney (and Jane's actual male relatives) were, unlike John Thorpe, addicted to "women's" reading. Anne Elliot (like Jane and Cassandra) was deeply versed in the prose and verse of male moralists. But the male side of the tradition has looked after itself; the female side needs Chawton.

Our objective is to gather together copies of as many titles by women writing in English between 1600 and 1830 as proves humanly possible. Many readers might be astonished to learn what a task that represents, and how many titles there are. *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English* gives details of approximately 800 women writers up to and including Jane Austen's time; that *might* be something like half of all the women whose writings have survived. By no means will all of these works be first editions. (It is rather sadly ironic that so many early works by women, whose writers in their lifetimes struggled and starved, are now immensely valuable just because they are so rare. They lie swaddled in collections where readers can't get at them.) But a high proportion of them will be editions dating from Austen's

lifetime or before. The flavor of her own reading will be recoverable by people using the Library today, as they become immersed in the press of the past — leather bindings, handmade paper, handset print, novels in several volumes, and with the long "s" and other habits of typography. Other texts in the Library will be scholarly editions, reflecting the upsurge of informed interest in early women's writing. Others still will be reprints, every one of which represents a place in the record and carries its own kind of historical interest.

Novels will predominate, but will be accompanied by plays, books of poetry, and non-fictional prose of all kinds. The male side of the tradition will be represented, though not so fully as the female. Books of criticism will be there (on Austen herself and on all kinds of relevant topics such as travel and cooking), and that indispensable genre, the reference book. This upsurge of informed interest will set its stamp on the Library's contents. The Library in turn will help to enable the next and vital wave of scholarship on the genesis of the novel as we know it today.

The Centre and the Chawton House Library are establishing working relationships with other research libraries like the Bodleian and the Huntington. The aim is for Austen students and scholars, students and scholars of early women's writing, and every sort of reader who feels an interest in this material, to be offered the opportunity to come to Chawton and feast their historical and literary curiosity.

Isobel Grundy is Director of the Chawton House Library and Henry Marshall Tory Professor in the Department of English at the University of Alberta, Canada. Her research interests center in writing by women in English from Jane Austen's generation and all those before her. She is joint author of The Feminist Companion to Literature in English: Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present (Yale 1990; with Virginia Blain and Patricia Clements). She is now working on Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, having jointly edited her Essays and Poems (Oxford 1993; with Robert Halsband), having two more editions of Montagu's writings in press (Romance Writings from Oxford and Selected Letters from Penguin) and a new biography in progress.



CHAWTON HOUSE LIBRARY REPORT

by

ANNE BLENMAN HARE

The Chawton House Library has been established to collect works of early women writers, generally covering works produced by women during the period 1600-1830. This literature, as well as related works pertaining to women's education, their legal and social status, travel, domestic business, and other material relevant to scholarship of the period, including modern reference works, are being acquired with the goal of making these rare books available for the use of academic guests of

the Study Centre, and eventually, to scholars internationally in digital form.

The present caretakers, Julia Huot and Anne Blenman Hare, owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to our Library Director, Isobel Grundy, and especially to Gaye King, who have advised us, and continue to advise us, regarding works to be included in the collection. At present, we have acquired nearly 4,000 books, of which more than 500 are novels written by women, with many other significant and rare works, which will become part of the Study Centre at Chawton when established. Of note in the collection is the manuscript of the play, *Sir Charles Grandison*, written by Jane Austen with her niece, and acquired by Sandy Lerner in 1991 (Brian Southam has transcribed and edited the manuscript, and provided commentary, in *Jane Austen's 'Sir Charles Grandison'* [Clarendon Press, 1980]).

We are working on cataloguing all these works at present, and at the same time, devising a cataloguing system that addresses the general needs of collections of early women writers. We will be working toward establishing connections with other similar collections, both to share resources and to devise methods to create digital texts of these early works. Digitization is necessary for the preservation of these rare and fragile works, and to allow for distribution to a wider readership. Optically scanned texts also provide the advantage of computer-based analysis. Although the digitizing of the texts is a project still in its beginning stages, it is an important part of the Library's agenda.

It appears that the works of the early women writers will have a more prominent place in literary history, judging from the interest in, and the escalating prices of, many of these works. We continue to collect those works appropriate to the collection and within the budget. We are grateful for the efforts of all those individuals who have brought these rare works to our attention when they become available, and more grateful yet to those who have donated works to the Library. We will highlight individual works and authors from the collection in future issues. We are certainly grateful to Eliza Haywood for her contribution to this newsletter, and will depend on *The Female Spectator* to inform readers of the progress we are making in the establishment of the Library.



BOOK DONATIONS

The Chawton House Library welcomes donations of books pertinent to the collection. Please contact Julia Huot at the Chawton Library for further details. Thank you.

Julia Huot
Acquisitions
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Mountain View, CA 94043 U.S.A.

The Female Spectator

The Female Spectator is the newsletter of the Centre for the Study of Early English Women's Writing. If you would like to receive future issues, please send your name and address, with your request to be placed on the mailing list, to the address below. Address changes should also be sent to:

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We encourage your comments, contributions, and suggestions.
Please address them to the editor at the above address.

EDITOR.....ANNE BLENMAN HARE

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