Reimagining Jane’s ‘Great House’

See us through to the next chapter…

Chawton House Library is currently at a pivotal moment in its 25-year history. Following the announcement by our Founding Patron, Dr. Sandy Lerner OBE, that she was stepping down from the Board of Trustees last year, the Charity is currently undertaking a strategic review, with a clear focus on reshaping the organisation and creating resilience. Through the Bosack Kruger Foundation, Dr. Lerner supported Chawton House Library with approximately 65% of its operating costs but, now that this relationship is coming to an end in four months, we face both significant challenges, and exciting possibilities.

The overarching ambition is to create a cultural literary destination within the wider grounds of Chawton House – known to Jane Austen and her family as the ‘Great House’. This will offer larger and more extensive visitor facilities and improved interpretation. It will provide an enhanced experience of the Chawton estate that was Jane Austen’s home throughout the final, productive years of her life, and continue to promote the women writers who inspired her. In turn, the revenue from these increased commercial activities will continue to support the education and research programmes, with the aim of inspiring future generations of readers and writers.

To achieve our ambitions, Chawton House Library is asking supporters to help keep our house and library going during a development phase, whilst progress is made on the planning and launch of a major capital project, Reimagining Jane Austen’s ‘Great House’. We will be launching a number of fundraising and awareness-raising activities as part of this campaign, the first of which has already begun: #TheDarcyLook.

To take part or to donate, please visit our website at www.chawtonhouselibrary.org, call 01420 541010, or text JANE03 £3 to 70070. For more information about the campaign, please visit www.janesgreathouse.org, or you can keep informed via our social media sites on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram.
Four days before Jane Austen’s death, the renowned writer, essayist and salonnière Germaine de Staël passed away in Paris on 14 July 1817. She was mourned by Europe. Just a week later, news of her death reached Winchester, the city where Austen spent her final months, when it was reported in The Hampshire Chronicle that ‘The celebrated Madame de Staël [sic] died at Paris.’

It was the relatively unknown Austen, however, not Staël, who went on to become globally celebrated. This summer, Austen will join Britain’s best-loved woman writer, from talks and television shows, to art installations and immersive re-enactments. Accompanying the exhibition cases are sculptures and engravings that form part of ‘Inspired by the Word’, a multi-venue visual arts exhibition by contemporary artists, to celebrate the literature of Hampshire writers, including Austen.

‘Fickle Fortunes: Jane Austen and Germaine de Staël’ will run from 12 June to 24 September 2017.

This exhibition would not have been possible without the financial support of the University of Southampton and the Friends of the National Libraries. Thanks also go to the University of Oxford, the National Library of Scotland, Catriona Seth, Janine Barchas, Sandra Clark, Huw Stephens, and the University of Southampton and The Friends of the National Libraries for donating or loaning items for this exhibition.

Who was Germaine de Staël?

Staël was ‘condemned to celebrity without being known.’

Despite the praise of Corinne, the poem ultimately extols the virtues of domestic femininity in contrast to the sort of public life that Corinne led. Staël herself was painted as a daughter of it. Italian heaven? ‘Thus, in wem its fire is given…’

The struggle with Napoleon continued, however. In 1830, in the middle of printing, Staël’s comparison of northern and southern literary traditions, L’Allemagne, was pulped by the French Emperor, who suppressed it because of its sympathy to Germany. John Murray, who published Jane Austen and Lord Byron, went on to publish L’Allemagne three years later, using a set of proofs that Staël had hidden. He reissued the French original and an English translation in 1853, and paid Staël 1,500 guineas for the book.

Staël’s home in Coppet became the site of many pilgrimages for other writers, although her increasing fame and her love affairs meant that she was not seen as altogether proper company for ladies. Staël had been married to diplomat Baron Erik Magnus Staël von Holstein, but it was a marriage of convenience and they had separated by 1797. Burney was reluctant to renew her acquaintance with Staël when she had the chance to 1802 and Jane Austen’s brother reported in 1833 that Jane had also refused to meet Staël. In her own words, Staël was ‘condemned to celebrity without being known.’
E. J. Clery is a Professor of English at the University of Southampton, and a former Visiting Fellow at Chawton House Library. In this article, she writes about her new book on Anna Letitia Barbauld’s poem Eighteenth Hundred and Eleven.

It began on a dark day in November with a conversation between three women in the upper reading room at Chawton House Library. The book open on my desk was an 1826 edition of The Works of Anna Letitia Barbauld, with a Memoir written by Lucy Aikin, published in New York soon after the appearance of the first British edition. Lucy Aikin had quickly published the two-volume work in the year of her aunt's death on 9 March 1825. It got a good deal of attention at the time, for Barbauld was a famous author, a household name. She achieved celebrity as a poet in the 1760s, going on to become an innovative writer for children and a campaigner for the abolition of slavery, political rights for religious Non-Conformists, and (any particular interest) an end to the war with France. Barbauld argued, along with other peace protesters, that the British government’s war policy was bringing about the economic ruin of the country. This is what Lucy Aikin had to say about Barbauld’s anti-war poem Eighteenth Hundred and Eleven, which aroused a storm of vilification in the Tory press when it came out in the Spring of 1812:

“This was the last of Mrs. Barbauld’s separate publications. Who indeed, that knew and loved her, could have wished her to expose again that ‘This was the last of Mrs. Barbauld’s separate publications. Who indeed, that knew and loved her, could have wished her to expose again that
Notes on a Manuscript Melodrama

Former Visiting Fellow Grace Harvey is a PhD student at the University of Lincoln, working on Charlotte Smith. Here, she writes about an exciting discovery made in the reading rooms at Chawton.

‘She was called down by one of the servants on the arrival of a party of strangers – she rushed into the room breathless and with a pen in her hand. ‘Oh! my God!’ said she – ‘have the kindness to excuse me I have left my nets to – do – do — but with an irrational disposition’. Though only a few scholars have attempted to piece together Holcroft’s life, all accounts reiterate and celebrate her eccentricities and independence. What we lack in concrete evidence about her life is made up for by the growing efforts to reconstruct her position in the canon.

In short biographies of Holcroft, Andrew Ashfield and Gary Kelly note that she was most likely born in 1780 and died in 1844, and that she was the daughter of Thomas Holcroft, a radical writer who was indicted in the 1794 Treason Trials. Indeed, most of what we do know about Holcroft can be traced back to her father. By the end of the 1790s she was acting as Thomas’s amanuensis (i.e. scribe), and she utilised this role to integrate herself in his radical and literary networks. While she copied letters for her father, Holcroft added postscripts to his letters, most notably to William Godwin. These short notes allowed Fanny to foster her own friendships and broaden her networks – she was known for her links to the writers Charles Lamb and the actress Frances Kelly as she was to her father’s friends.

Yet, though she invariably benefited from a series of introductions made by her father, as well as the rich education he ensured she received, Holcroft was a talented writer and her achievements were the product of merit, not merely networks. Gary Kelly lists her extensive talents: much like her father, she was a translator, poet, novelist, playwright and was even described as an excellent musician too. She published a series of poems, most notably ‘The Negro’, in the Monthly Magazine between 1797 and 1803, although these were never reprinted as a collection. Holcroft went on to publish two novels, The Wife and the Lover (1817), and Fortitude and Frailty (1817). She dedicated the latter to her father, who had died in 1809. She also wrote a melodrama, Goldsmith, which was first performed in 1827.

In addition to her short postscripts to Godwin, Clairmont’s musings, and other snippets from Charles Lamb and Thomas’s Holcroft, the Pforzheimer Collection at the New York Public Library features an undated letter written by Fanny Holcroft to an unknown recipient. It is written in two hands, but the lack of other examples makes it difficult to ascertain which, or even if, either of these hands is Holcroft’s. Indeed, if one is Holcroft’s, then we need to ask who the other belongs to, and what processes of collaboration were at play in the writing of Goldsmith. Whilst these questions are necessarily difficult to answer, the manuscript serves as a reminder of the necessity of a more urgent consideration of Holcroft’s life and writing.

Goldsmith was first performed in the summer of 1827 at Haymarket, and there is some evidence to suggest it was performed elsewhere. It is a relatively short melodrama, comprised of only two acts, but the manuscript itself provides certain clues as to the writing process. It is written in two hands, but the lack of other examples makes it difficult to ascertain which, or even if, either of these hands is Holcroft’s. Indeed, if one is Holcroft’s, then we need to ask who the other belongs to, and what processes of collaboration were at play in the writing of Goldsmith. Whilst these questions are necessarily difficult to answer, the manuscript serves as a reminder of the necessity of a more urgent consideration of Holcroft’s life and writing.

The eccentric ‘she’ that Mary Shelley’s step-sister Claire Clairmont refers to here is Fanny Holcroft; a nineteenth-century poet, playwright and novelist who, despite her relatively obscure status, was part of a rich network of writers throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Though her work remains on the margins of the canon, it shouldn’t surprise any reader of The Female Spectator to learn that Holcroft has found her home at Chawton House Library; one of her manuscripts found in the archives has proven to be of consequence to the recovery of her life and her works.

Any attempt to think about Fanny Holcroft’s life and work is immediately stilled by the sheer lack of definitive biography; Clairmont’s journal is one of only a handful of documents that tell us about her; and only a few of Holcroft’s own letters that survive. Clairmont reveals Holcroft to be eccentric, headstrong, and committed to her writing, while others refer to her as ‘toxic’ and ‘docile’, but with an ‘irrational disposition’. Though only a few scholars have attempted to piece together Holcroft’s life, all accounts reiterate and celebrate her eccentricities and independence. What we lack in concrete evidence about her life is made up for by the growing efforts to reconstruct her position in the canon.
The characters in Burney’s novels also have a liking for the dramatical, which they pursue in their frequent visits to the theatre from Evelina (1778) onwards. In addition, in Camilla (1796), the characters discuss the possibility of amateur theatricals, and the characters in The Wanderer (1814) actually put on John Vanbrugh’s and Colley Cibber’s The Provoked Husband (1728). Burney gives these amateur theatricals a lovely presentation in her novels, drawing on the excitement and embarrassment we can already sense in the letters on her own performances. Indeed, Ellis, the main protagonist in The Wanderer, comes into her own during the performance of The Provoked Husband.

In the letters, it becomes rather clear that Burney and her family carefully controlled these performances, rewriting and editing scenes themselves and leaving only slight potential for harmless embarrassment, such as forgetting your lines. Nowhere in the letters do we find the kinds of amateur theatricals that would lead Sir Bertram to forbid the crew at Mansfield Park from performing the play Lovers’ Vows in Jane Austen’s novel. The diaries and journal letters that Burney wrote over the almost eighty years of her life have been heavily edited by Burney and her niece Charlotte Barnett, who would go on to publish them after Burney’s death in 1842. Burney and her niece wielded scissors and cut out substantial passages, so that many family secrets are irretrievably lost. These family secrets could have potentially included amateur theatricals that were more than a little embarrassing, but we have no reason to suspect that.

From the diaries and journal letters that we have emerges a lively image of the amateur theatricals in the family circle. Performances in the Burney household were much anticipated, fondly prepared and produced, and they were a place where the younger members of the household, such as Frances and Anna Maria Burney during the performance in 1777, could shine. The choice of play – Henry Fielding’s Tom Thumb – is hence surprising for this occasion. Fielding’s Tom Thumb is a rather risqué political satire. It was one of the plays that are thought to have contributed to the introduction of the Licensing Act in 1737, which introduced pre-censorship for plays and limited theatrical performances in London to the patent theatres of Covent Garden and Haymarket. Fielding’s thumb-sized hero runs through a good number of sexually suggestive dialogues with Huncamunca and her mother Glumdalca, until in a mock-tragic ending about half a dozen characters are killed off within a few lines. If Frances Burney played Huncamunca in the original version of Fielding’s play, this would be truly newsworthy, given Burney’s customary concern for her reputation, but plays in the eighteenth century were habitually modified to suit the needs of performances, both professional and amateur, and certainly Tom Thumb was no exception.

It is perhaps the relentless mockery of dramatic conventions that made Tom Thumb, once relived of its more risqué notes, an attractive choice for the Burney household performance. Fielding’s play spoofs the heroic and the tragic, while yet, it seems, maintaining enough pathos for Anna Maria Burney to touch the heart of her aunt. Indeed, when Frances Burney’s son Alexander d’Aubray was presented at court in 1800, his repertoire, as Burney recalls in a letter, included passages from Tom Thumb.

He! Dogs! Arrest my Friend before my Face! Thinkest thou Tom Thumb will withdraw his Disgrace?

But let vain Censure threaten by the Words Tom Thumb shall show his Anger by his Sward!

II, 2, 30–34.

One may imagine little Alexander outfitted in a uniform, with a toy-sword in his hand, declaring these lines, and Frances Burney evokes exactly that image in letters in the early 1800s and as late as 1824. Sweet and comical as Alexander the little hero may seem to today’s readers, this was also a way for Burney to remind the court that her husband, and Alexander’s father, the General d’Aubray, was a military man with valuable skills in need of a new commission.

Amateur theatricals are more than simple entertainments. As recorded in diaries and letters, and represented in memoirs and novels, they offer a window into the ways in which families like the Burney’s enjoyed themselves, brought drama and excitement to the living room and tailored cultural capital to their needs.
As part of Regency Week, Royal School of Needlework graduate Charlotte Bailey hosted embroidery workshops.

At the beginning of June, Chawton House Library hosted a conference by the Independent Libraries Association. Under the banner ‘Bricks, Shelves, Books and People: Building for the Future’, there were talks on treasures kept in various institutions including Gladstone’s Library (Gladstone’s crenelated bookcases), The London Library (the Per Nozze collection) and the Gerald Coke Handel collection at the Foundling Museum.

Students from the University of Southampton sample a selection of Chawton House Library’s Gothic material and enjoy the gardens.

Chawton Village Open Gardens weekend saw our Garden Manager Andrew win third prize in the scarecrow contest for his six wives of Henry VIII, who were positioned around the wilderness.

Betty Schellenberg (Simon Fraser University) gave a fascinating evening lecture on literary coteries, friendship groups which circulated manuscripts in the eighteenth century.

Despite the inclusion of her play *Lovers’ Vows* in Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, Elizabeth Inchbald’s theatrical repertoire has been neglected, slipping out of performance after her death and not achieving regular revivals, unlike the work of some of her male peers.

This state of affairs is soon to be corrected, thanks to the work of Lost Text/Found Space. Founder and director Rebecca McCutcheon writes about reviving Inchbald.

Elizabeth Inchbald was an extraordinarily successful playwright, actor and editor in her lifetime, writing successful Drury Lane comedies and adaptations as well as novels. Her work is characterised to a degree by her underlying politics – as a close friend of William Godwin and Thomas Holcroft, Inchbald was sympathetic to humanist, radical views. It is perhaps this quality which gives it a distinctly modern flavour to her writing when re-examined today. Her chosen subjects are treated with great empathy, which extends most to those characters she depicts at the margins of acceptable social life. The central characters in *Lovers’ Vows* deal with illegitimate pregnancy and the shame and stigma that it bore in eighteenth-century society. Inchbald is at pains to humanise the figures that, by another author, might easily have been depicted negatively.

Within Inchbald’s oeuvre there is only one tragedy, a play called *The Massacre*. I discovered it while researching Christopher Marlowe’s play on the same subject at the British Library. Inchbald depicts a family, trapped in their home, attempting to escape the massacres of Huguenots by Catholics in France in 1572. Writing at the time of the Terror, during the French Revolution, there is a strong sense in the writing that Inchbald is seeking to shine a theatrical light on the atrocities which she condemned, despite her own radical politics. The play was never performed, Inchbald herself determining that it would ‘never please’.

Yet working with the play as a director, I have often felt that there has never been a more appropriate moment for it. The play helps us to understand the experiences of persecuted people, the desperation it must take to pack up a bag of possessions and seek sanctuary on another shore. It depicts a vision of an England which is a noble, neighbourly refuge to people who are in need. In the figure of the mob leader, Dugas, it shows us the peril of mobs, of dog-whistle politics, and of scapegoating. And, pleasingly, in the redemptive figure of the ‘judge’, Glandeve, we find a resolve and an appeal to a core set of humanist beliefs which are as valuable in today’s troubled times as they were in Inchbald’s.

My directing process uses unusual sites and locations as a creative stimulus to offer new insights and powerful atmospheres to lost texts. In November I’ll be directing *The Massacre* at Safehouse in Peckham in a new version, titled *Til We Meet in England*. 

Lost Text/Found Space is a new London-based company founded by director and researcher Dr Rebecca McCutcheon with designer Tahlilah Mason and performer Tahlilah Wellsley-Wesley, which engages with lost texts by women authors, relocating these texts to sites which offer new perspectives upon them, and creating engaging and moving immersive performances. For more information please visit www.RebeccaMcCutcheon.com or follow the company on Twitter @LostTFSpace.
This issue of *The Female Spectator* is sponsored by Routledge Historical Resources: *History of Feminism*

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**Paying tribute to pioneering women**

*The Female Spectator* is named after Eliza Haywood's publication of the same name, which was published from April 1744 to May 1746. Haywood's journal – which was a direct play on the existing *Spectator* founded in 1711 by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele – was widely read. Haywood was familiar with the challenges of life for women within a patriarchal system, and she wrote pragmatic advice on what kind of education women should seek, and on common difficulties such as how to avoid disastrous marriages and deal with wandering husbands.

The journal featured romantic and satiric fiction, moral essays and social and political commentary, covering everything from the craze for tea drinking and the problem of gambling, to politics, war and diplomacy, and the importance of science and natural history.

**A Note to Readers**

Starting in 2018, *The Female Spectator* will become a yearly rather than quarterly publication. We are in the process of reconceptualising the magazine, but will of course ensure that our friends and followers are regularly kept up to date in electronic newsletters, and via our website. If you are not on our mailing list, please subscribe at www.chawtonhouselibrary.org