

# The Female Spectator.

VOL.2 No.3, 2016



New and improved series

## 'Adopt a Book' programme success

OUR NEW ADOPT a Book programme is proving to be a popular and special way to support Chawton House Library and our work. Our Librarian, Dr Darren Bevin, gives us an update on its progress...

The aim we have set ourselves for our new Adopt a Book initiative is to have secured 2,017 adoptions by the end of 2017, the bicentenary of Jane Austen's death. We are very grateful to all those who have adopted one of our books so far, and know that – in the case of several of our supporters – they have adopted a book as a gift for a friend or family member.

We are extremely grateful, too, to two major donors to the programme. John Turner, a longstanding local supporter of Chawton House Library, who lives in neighbouring Alton, has recently given our initiative a significant boost. John has donated £2,500 for a bespoke

adoption of our first edition of Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* in memory of his wife Jean. I think I speak for all of us here at Chawton House Library when I express my profound and heartfelt gratitude for this generous gift. John's words to accompany his adoption are: *'In loving memory of Jean Turner 1938-2014. A beautiful mind and the gentle loving wife of John'*. We hope that this feels a fitting tribute, and that it will provide comfort to know that Jean's passion for women's writing lives on through this support. John's generous donation represents 150 books, and we are extremely grateful to him.

Across the Atlantic, our supporter Gina Heath King – a member of our Bluestocking Circle – has donated \$5,000 dollars to the programme. Gina wanted to adopt the 1833 edition of Austen's *Emma*, one of our 'librarian's selection' specifically to encourage others to donate. Gina says:

*'My choice to adopt the 1833 Philadelphia version of Emma was an easy decision – especially in the bicentenary year of its first publication in England and the US. Emma has been a long-time favourite of mine as well as a component of my graduate work. As an American and a Bluestocking member of the North American Friends of Chawton House Library, I am pleased to have adopted this work currently on display as part of the Emma At 200 exhibition at Chawton House Library, and hope others will be encouraged to do the same.'*

With her adoption, Gina adds 200 books to our target. •

Thank you to John, to Gina, and to everyone who has supported the programme. We would also like to give particular thanks to Philippa Knight, Dr Manushag Powell and Dr Linda Bree. We are now almost a quarter of the way towards our target of 2,017 books by 2017.



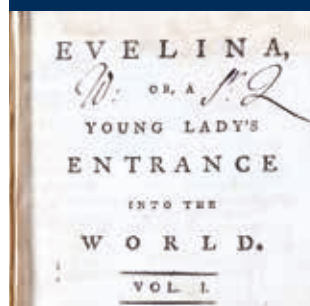
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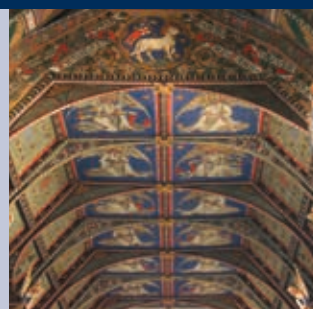
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Excellence Award



Visitor praise for Chawton House Library

# We interview Professor Janet Todd OBE



Janet Todd is an Honorary Fellow of Newnham College, Cambridge, retired President of Lucy Cavendish College, Professor Emerita of the University of Aberdeen and a Patron of Chawton House Library.

She is a pioneering scholar of women's writing of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. She founded the journal *Women and Literature* in the 1970s and co-founded *Women's Writing* in the 1980s. Among other books, she is the author of *Women's Friendship in Literature* (1980), *Feminist Literary History* (1988), *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn* (1996), *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Revolutionary Life* (2000), *Daughters of Ireland* (2006), and *Death and the Maidens: Fanny Wollstonecraft and the Shelley Circle* (2008). She edited *The complete Works of Aphra Behn and, with Marilyn Butler, The Complete Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*. She is also the General Editor of the nine-volume *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen*.

**T**EACHING IN GHANA and Puerto Rico, engaging with feminist politics in America, writing a pioneering encyclopaedia of women's writing in the US and UK, founding a course in Life-Writing at the University of East Anglia and a prize for women's fiction at Lucy Cavendish College, Cambridge – these are just some of the many fascinating twists and turns in the prestigious career of our Patron, Professor Janet Todd OBE. We caught up with her at the launch of her first original novel *A Man of Genius* to talk about this latest work, and the many highlights of a prolific career spanning more than five decades.

**Please tell us a bit about your early career**

Prior to my retirement last year, I worked for 51 years without a break – in my time, there was no maternity leave so I really do mean no break! I didn't start out wanting to be an academic. I always wanted to be a writer. I think throughout my career the novelist was trying to get out – and you can see this when I turned to writing biographies in the 1990s; I was gradually getting closer to fiction.

**No maternity leave must have been a challenge. Were there other challenges you faced as a woman in academia?**

Yes, very many. I went to one of only two colleges at Cambridge where women were accepted and, although the college was very focussed on women, we were treated like second-class citizens in the wider university. I can remember one lecturer actually asking us to sit at the back of the hall. When much later I was applying for grants as a married woman with a baby, I remember being given a much smaller amount, even though my husband did not have an income at the time. If you got pregnant, you had to hide it as long as you could when you were looking for a job, and then, if you got it, have the baby and go straight back to work. I did this in Puerto Rico, where, however, other women were very supportive, so it was not as difficult as it sounds.

Although I can see some flaws in it now, Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* was a huge eye-opener and influence on me, and helped me to understand and talk about what was going on in literary history and culture. I went to America in 1968 and it was quite a foreign idea to me that a University could be an institution where you thought about personal and social issues. I had done an old-fashioned degree at Cambridge in England (good in many ways but it did not really suit me), and in comparison, early academic feminism in 60s America was very exciting.

**You were also in America during the Vietnam War. What was it like being so close to the student protest movement at that time?**

I can remember being in the library when tear gas was thrown through the windows; I remember water cannons being deployed and the pain of being caught in the water. America was my first experience of a youth culture, a counter culture in which young people dressed and thought and behaved differently from their parents. I was impressed by the notion of students having actual political power on a national stage and being able to change something by writing and acting.



Before America, you taught in Ghana – what made you decide to go to Ghana after graduating from Cambridge?

I couldn't get a job! Women were not encouraged to go on to further study the way the male graduates were. With some difficulty I had found a job in a tax office but I was having doubts about this and I saw a newspaper advert that said 'teachers wanted in Ghana', so off I went. Weirdly I was assigned to teach French and African History. When I got there, I met several other women also from Newnham College, Cambridge, who had done the same thing. It was an interesting period in Ghana following independence; I was there during a very exciting and confusing political coup that unseated Kwame Nkrumah. I also met African writers, the first time in my life that I had come across living authors.

What was it like moving from American to English academia?

I came back to England in the early 1980s and career-wise it was a stupid thing to do. In America, I was well thought of as a pioneer of the study of women writers. In England, where academic feminism was developing at a much slower pace, my particular type of work was not much admired. To find work I had to cut many of the feminist items out of my CV and instead focus on other scholarship I had done: a book about English Congregational Hymns and a study of John Clare. Then I got a job!

Were you always particularly interested in women writers?

No, I started out with a passion for great Russian writers such as Dostoyevsky, especially his *Brothers Karamazov*. I was always interested in radicalism and opposition in literature though and I think my experience of the idealistic movements of the 60s and 70s drew me to look at the radical men and women of the 1790s. This of course led me to Mary



Wollstonecraft. I wanted to study her for my PhD but nobody much had heard of her at the time, so I worked on John Clare instead, an oppositional figure of a very different kind. Much of my work on early women writers was basic, involving a lot of digging around in libraries since writers like Wollstonecraft and Aphra Behn and many others were obscure then. As a result much of my early work now seems quite crude. We've come a long way since those early days! In my later work I have greatly missed the late Marilyn Butler as she was an intellectual sister as well as a dear friend.

Many of the women we excavated are now well known and taught in university courses. I still think Aphra Behn is not as famous among the wider public as she should be; for me she is among the greatest of early women writers. (I have just revised my 1996 biography and it is being reissued next year.) But on the whole much progress has been made in restoring early women to their rightful place in our literary heritage. Chawton House Library is at the apex of all this work, so it is a great privilege to be associated with it.

You have also worked on a number of women connected to Mary Wollstonecraft – can you tell us a bit about them?

Yes, I wrote about the aristocratic girls that Mary Wollstonecraft tutored in Ireland who went on to become involved with the Irish Rebellion of 1798. I then wrote about Fanny Wollstonecraft [also known as Fanny

Imlay and Fanny Godwin] and Mary Shelley [also known as Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin]. I was very interested in their relationship with their mother [who died giving birth to Mary when Fanny was three years old]. Their famous dead mother was a shadow over both their lives – an idealised figure to live up to – and I was very interested in the psychology of the two daughters. The pathetic story of Fanny, which I wrote about in *Death and the Maidens*, is the saddest part of the legacy of Mary Wollstonecraft.

Does your new novel also explore psychological themes?

Yes, the central characters are in a tortuous relationship – some might call it abusive – where they need but are not good for each other. I was particularly interested in exploring the notion of masculine genius prevalent during the Regency period – examples are Byron and Shelley (though my male character is not based on either). There was an idea that women had to bow to these men of genius and the men gave themselves a licence to treat the people around them, particularly women, very badly. I also wanted to explore how we understand ourselves and our memories, for example, how much of what we remember is true memory and how much is memory imposed by other people and by the prevailing culture. The woman at the centre of the novel is a hack writer of gothic novels and she finds herself in something like a gothic novel. People tend to think of gothic novels as rather puerile but they do express fears that are little expressed in other literature – fears about sexuality, repression and the anxiety of maturing and ageing.

The book is based in London and Venice. How did you come to know Venice so well?

In my life I have always taken risks and moving to Venice 12-13 years ago was one of these! I had gone there to write about Byron and Shelley and I ended up buying a flat! Venice is quite a difficult place to live in but its difficulties are part of its allure. At the time the novel is based, Venice had been conquered by Napoleon, and, after several shifts, was annexed by Austria. There was anxiety in the city which expressed itself in a kind of decadent jollity as well as in feverish but very effective plotting. I should mention that, although *A Man of Genius* is my first original novel, I had written an eBook spinoff from one of my favourite writers, Jane Austen of course. It is called *Lady Susan Plays the Game* and it has recently been published as a paperback. It too takes its main character to Venice! ●



ON SALE NOW

Janet's debut novel, *A Man of Genius*, is on sale now in hardback.

Chawton House Library has a limited number of signed copies in our shop at the special price of £15 available on a first come, first served basis.

Please call 01420 541010 to order.

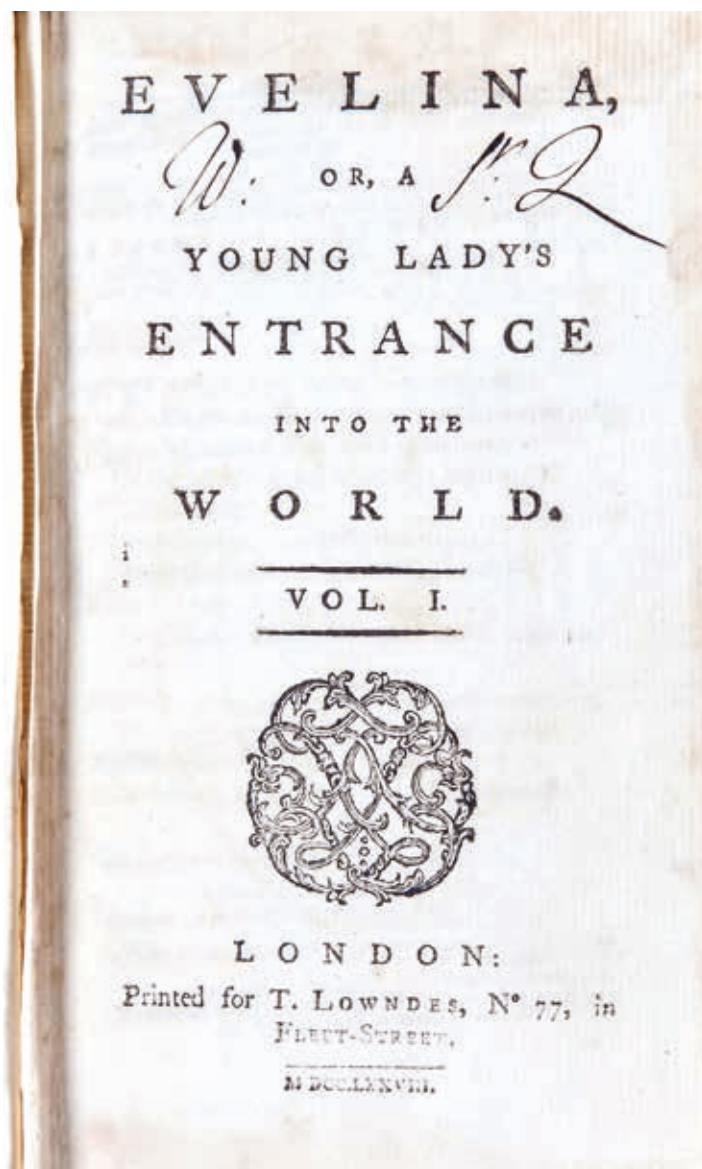
# Amatory Fiction in the Domestic Novel

**I**N 1767, at the age of 15, for reasons unknown though much speculated over, Frances Burney burnt her draft manuscripts. Aleksandra Hultquist, Chawton House Library Visiting Fellow in 2010 and 2016, of the Australian Research Council's Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotion, examines the 'ghost' of one of these earlier works, along with the early work of Jane Austen, and explores their implications for the literary heritage of the domestic novel.

At first glance, the work of late-seventeenth century libertine playwright, Aphra Behn, and well-mannered satiric novelist Jane Austen have little in common. The former moved in raucous, lascivious Stuart London, the latter lived in the familial safety of rural Georgian England. Behn's plays were known for their raunchy jokes, Royalist politics, and sexual exploration; Austen's novels, for their quaint and sly depictions of domestic middle-class manners. Behn was the first professional woman writer of England, whose plays (about twenty in total) were more numerous and popular than poet laureate John Dryden's works; Austen was barely known in her life-time and her six neat novels are possibly only the early works in a writing life that was cut short by ill health. There is no proof that Jane Austen read anything of Aphra Behn's. And yet, Austen's decorous novels and Behn's raunchy plays have important similarities, which carry implications for women's literary history.

Chawton House Library is distinctive in that it collects, maintains, and makes available items that scholars can use to research and record the significance of writing by women. It is a place where scholars can preserve a history of women's accomplishments so that future generations will not have to repeat recovery work. A useful activity in writing literary history is to connect seemingly oppositional women authors and consider how they influence and were influenced by each other. The story of the domestic novel, that is a novel focusing on private life and manners ending in marriage, begins in the 1740s and is based on a definition of male authors' texts. Previous scholars have argued that the domestic novel is a reaction to amatory fiction, novellas written by women between 1680-1740 that were concerned with illegitimate love. This argument suggests that amatory fiction is important, because later writers rejected it. Where amatory works are unrealistic, overblown, dangerously titillating, and poorly written, domestic novels are, conversely, emotionally balanced, define the appropriate virtues for a rising middle-class, and are aesthetically pleasing due to their realism. Thus the middle-class, domestic writings by Austen and Frances Burney, for instance, reject their literary foremothers' contributions to the novel. Feminist critics, however, have argued against this theory, and I was interested in further tracing this influence.

My work at Chawton House Library this year concentrated on Burney's and Austen's earliest works, to see how the amatory might have been embraced by late-century authors. Both writers were actively composing works in their teens. Both households were familiar with Restoration plays, eighteenth-century novels, and works by women writers, and I was



interested in discovering if their early work in particular was influenced by earlier generations. Austen's *Lady Susan*, for instance, has much in common with the prose works of Behn, as Janet Todd has pointed out: both feature strong and distasteful women characters. Both create almost unrealistic circumstances for their stories. Both deal in adultery. Whether or not Austen read Behn, she certainly learned these lessons in some way. Austen has been credited with mostly masculine mentors like Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, and Samuel Johnson, so the question of her literary foremothers interests me.

While Austen famously gave credit to Burney as her literary foremother in *Northanger Abbey*, previous women writers' direct influence on Burney is unclear. Burney associated herself with male authors and likened her



work to that of Jean Jacques Rousseau, Samuel Johnson, Pierre Marivaux, Henry Fielding, Samuel Richardson, and Tobias Smollet. Nevertheless, there are echoes of Behn and other early women authors like Eliza Haywood in Burney's work. Perhaps the most intriguing story about Burney's early writing describes her burning all of her manuscripts. With the pages gone up in smoke more than two centuries ago, it would seem that there is no chance to trace Burney's influences on her early works. And yet there is. Thanks to Chawton House Library, I was able to find some of Burney's ghosts—the ghost of an early, destroyed manuscript, *The History of Caroline Evelyn* that was the backstory for her first published novel, *Evelina*, and the ghosts of women authors who appear in that and others of her works. To find *Caroline Evelyn*, I researched Burney's early life, as well as combing over *Evelina* (the Library has a first edition of this work, published in 1776) to see if I could reconstruct Caroline Eveline, both character and manuscript, from the existing novel. I found several likenesses between the early and later works that argue for the influence of early women writers on both Burney and Austen. Hidden within both late-century writers' works is the ghost of a genre called amatory fiction.

Amatory fiction is a sub-genre of the novel, written by British women writers between 1680-1740; its representative authors are usually identified as Behn, Delarivier Manley, and Haywood. The Library has early editions of many of these authors' works, including the 1735 (eighth) edition of Behn's *Love-Letters between a Nobleman and his Sister* (1684-87); Manley's *Power of Love* (first edition, 1720), and Haywood's *The Rash Resolve* (first edition, 1724). Amatory novellas are stories of heterosexual relationships that follow the cultural-sexual education of a young, innocent, often country-bred, modestly wealthy, young woman by an older, sexually experienced, worldly, often aristocratic and very wealthy man. These narratives always centre on illicit seduction, an act that often occurs through the promise of marriage, a false marriage, or a secret marriage, and most plots contain a masked scene of sexual activity, sometimes bordering on rape. The meat of the amatory tale consists of the emotional, physical, psychological, and social implications of such an encounter. Women are jilted and (often) left pregnant and alone by the very men who had proclaimed their devotion. Women survive neglectful lovers, miscarriages and abortions, suicide attempts, and bitter families. The novellas tend to have ambiguous, sometimes perplexing finishes that provide no overt punishment for their heroines' premarital or adulterous sexual affairs. Although an ending may appear to banish the protagonist to a distant locale, for instance, there is usually ample room to read the ending in a positive light; many characters regain their reputation for virtuous living.

I noticed, several years ago, that many of the genres that supposedly rejected the licentious writing of the amatory, in fact needed an amatory narrative in order to establish and resolve the plot of the work. Amatory narratives are built into the fiction of Austen, for instance: in *Sense and Sensibility*, the tale of the two Elizas establishes Col. Brandon's good character and exposes Willoughby as a rake. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Lydia's affair and eventual marriage to Wickham allows Elizabeth to see Mr. Darcy's devotion. Edmund and Fanny's match in *Mansfield Park* can only occur because of the adulterous affair between Maria Rushworth and Henry Crawford. Similarly, the story of *Evelina's* successful entrance into the world is contingent upon exposing her father and mother's secret marriage and thus her legitimacy, which further warrants her marriage to Lord Orville. She must unearth the amatory to get her domestic ending.

What follows is a map of the close reading that I did to find the mother, *The History of Caroline Evelyn*, in the daughter, *Evelina*. Burney wrote

of the fiery incident, in her *Memoirs of Doctor Burney* (1832), the Library copy of which is inscribed by her: 'For the Revd. William Harness To whose active good offices the *immediate* publication is indebted—From the Author.' Burney states that though the pages of *Caroline Evelyn* were destroyed, the idea itself could not be obliterated and that 'irresistibly and almost unconsciously, the whole of *A Young Lady's Entrance into the World*, was pent up in [Burney's] memory, ere a paragraph was committed to paper.' 'Irresistibly and almost unconsciously' the story of Caroline Evelyn's daughter takes on a life of her own. The amatory cannot be fully repressed, despite its consignment to flames and hoped-for oblivion. Burney knew, of course, what happened to Caroline, but she could not tell what would happen to Evelina, and this she needed to find out. Despite the guilt, the embarrassment, the expected criticisms from her father, despite trying to destroy her 'scribbling propensities,' Burney could not obliterate the importance of this amatory tale; instead *Evelina's* resurrection from the ashes to become a novel of respectability necessarily begins with the amatory fiction, *Caroline Evelyn*. Thus, quite concretely, *Evelina* is a debtor to and inheritor of amatory fiction.

*Evelina's* debt to amatory fiction has several examples, but here I concentrate on the similarities of the plots. According to the account provided by Rev. Villars (guardian to Evelina, her mother, and grandfather) the suffering of the 'much-injured...late Lady Belmont' (i.e. Caroline), begins when Caroline turns eighteen. Her lower-class mother, Madame Duval, sends for Caroline and tries to violently impose a marriage match between her and M. Duval's nephew, a marriage meant



Frances Burney's works at  
Chawton House Library

to keep the Duval money within familial control. The amatory becomes most recognizable when 'Miss Evelyn, to whom wrath and violence had hitherto been strangers, soon grew weary of this usage; and rashly, and without a witness, consented to a private marriage with Sir John Belmont, a very profligate young man, who had but too successfully found means to insinuate himself into her favour.' Sir John, disappointed in his hopes for a dowry because of the Duvals' wrath, 'infamously burnt the certificate of their marriage, and denied that they had ever been united!' Caroline goes to Rev. Villars for protection, gives birth, and dies, bequeathing Evelina to Villars's care.

Rev. Villars's account in volume one is both prejudiced against Sir John, and ignorant of details of the intimacy of the Caroline-Sir John love affair. The novel, however, also provides a perspective of the amatory in volume three from Caroline's point of view. In a letter she writes on her deathbed to Sir John, she asks, as her dying wish, that he acknowledge the child as legitimate. Her affection for Sir John was genuine: she calls him 'the lover who rescued me,' a 'friend,' a man 'once so dear to me' and she appeals to 'the love I once bore thee.' As in amatory plots, Caroline is wealthy, well educated, and naïve. She consents to, through both desperation and love, a secret marriage to Sir John, the aristocratic, rakish, wealthy, older seducer. She is impregnated, abandoned, and disgraced. She posthumously regains her reputation as a virtuous wife at the end of *Evelina*. Her story is easily mapped on to the popular genre of amatory fiction. As to the details of their affair, we have nothing: no letters, no second-hand accounts, no reminiscences in secret, no details of their meeting, falling in love, escape, or secret marriage. The very meat of the amatory genre, the emotional journey of the protagonist, is missing; such details were consigned to the flames. But we don't really need them. By the end of eighteenth-century, the amatory mode has grown so thoroughly a part of fiction that the amatory tale need only be hinted at: 'we' know what happened. 'We' can read it in any Behn or Haywood text that we choose.

While Burney's burning would seem to indicate that the era of passionate amatory fiction was over, I argue that this act is an example of how amatory fiction was a necessary part of eighteenth-century prose fiction. The domestic novel in this example literally rises from the ashes of the amatory novella. In short, there is no domestic heroine, Evelina, without the disgraced amatory protagonist, Caroline Evelyn. The amatory narratives in later-century domestic novels demonstrate how they are necessarily bound to amatory fiction. There is a feminine inheritance to the novel, as well as a masculine one. ●

## TripAdvisor Certificate of Excellence

WE ARE DELIGHTED to announce that we have recently been awarded the TripAdvisor Certificate of Excellence. This award celebrates hospitality excellence and is given only to establishments that consistently achieve outstanding traveller reviews on TripAdvisor. Here are just a few of many glowing comments we have received on TripAdvisor since increasing our visitor opening times... ●



*'Enchanting place, very educational'* Christa M, Valencia, Spain

*'A beautiful fascinating place to visit'* John K

*'Fabulous and friendly!'* Jane L

*'Stunning place full of history'* Sian R

*'An absolute must to visit'* David T

## Chawton House Library joins the Association of Independent Libraries

OUR LIBRARIAN, DR DARREN BEVIN EXPLAINS a little more about this association and his recent speech at its annual conference...

Chawton House Library is now a member of the Association of Independent Libraries following a keynote talk I gave at their 27th annual conference in Nottingham in June this year. Under the banner 'Sustainability and Relevance: the Independent Library in 2016', the talk focused on communicating collections to the user community, and centred on the various activities that are carried out at Chawton House Library such as conferences, evening talks, exhibitions, our Visiting Fellowship programme, the book conservation project, and more. Recent books published by Chawton House Press were on display as well as a plethora of leaflets highlighting the ways one can get more involved with the Library. Our book conservation video featuring aerial shots of the property and work in progress on the rare books proved particularly popular.

The conference was held at Bromley House Library in Nottingham which is currently celebrating its 200th birthday. Founded in 1816, it is an independent lending library situated in the very centre of Nottingham and one of the few remaining subscription libraries in the country. The conference itself contained a full programme over two days including talks on charitable giving to independent libraries, a comparative study between independent libraries in the UK and USA, and opportunities through academic partnerships.

Chawton House Library will be hosting the Association's annual conference next year at the beginning of June as part of a particularly busy summer as we observe the bicentenary of Jane Austen's death. ●





# Elizabeth Blackwell Herb Garden Now Officially Open!

**S**HE FREED HER husband from prison with one of the first botanical books compiled by a woman, the famous Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus gave her the epithet 'Botanica Blackwellia', and now more than 250 years after her death, Elizabeth Blackwell, the little-known but important botanist has been honoured with a herb garden in her name here at Chawton House Library.

Elizabeth Blackwell, a well-educated daughter of a successful Scottish merchant, was forced to work to support herself and her child when the collapse of her husband's fledgling printing business in London resulted in his detainment in debtor's prison.

Blackwell spotted a gap in the market for a new 'herbal', a book describing and illustrating different plants and their uses in medicine. Taking rooms near Chelsea Physic Gardens for the purpose, and enlisting her husband Alexander's help in supplying the correct names, Blackwell painstakingly drew each plant, engraved the copper plates for printing, and hand-coloured the prints.

Released in weekly instalments from 1736-39, with endorsement from the Royal College of Physicians, *A Curious Herbal*, was a tremendous success, its proceeds freeing Alexander Blackwell from prison, and the two completed volumes selling for the very considerable sum (at the time) of £5.

Speaking about the new Herb Garden, officially opened by Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire, Nigel Atkinson, on Thursday 14 July, the Library's Garden Manager, Andrew Bentley said 'I am delighted to have created what I believe is a worthy tribute to this early pioneering botanist, which gives visitors an insight into eighteenth-century medicine while also providing a tranquil, visually appealing garden to explore.' He added, 'It adds to the experience further to visit the House and Library and see the first edition of this extraordinary work which inspired the garden's creation.'

The success of Blackwell's venture did not prevent her husband from coming to an unfortunate end for, although she earned him his freedom, he was later executed in Sweden for his part in a supposed political intrigue there. Nevertheless, thanks to the new herb garden, Elizabeth Blackwell's legacy lives on. ●

We hope many of our supporters will visit the garden in person soon. A set of 8 gift cards exclusive to Chawton House Library and featuring Elizabeth Blackwell's beautiful illustrations is now available to purchase for £5 from our shop. Elizabeth Blackwell's *A Curious Herbal* is also featured in our Adopt a Book programme. Please call 01420 541010 to order or for further information.



Our Executive Director, Dr Gillian Dow, shows HM Lord Lieutenant Nigel Atkinson the book which inspired the garden.

Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant cuts the ribbon and officially opens the Elizabeth Blackwell Herb Garden with (left to right), Alton Deputy Mayor, Councillor Dean Philips, Executive Director Dr Gillian Dow, Garden Manager, Andrew Bentley, and Novelist and Supporter, Gill Hornby.







# Chawton Church and 'the chapel within the court of the manor'

**L**OCAL HISTORY EXPERT, Jane Hurst, explains her recent discoveries about the ecclesiastical history of the Chawton parish – including an entirely separate chapel from the Chawton Church within the medieval manor complex where Chawton House Library now stands.

The church of St Nicholas stands on one side of the drive up to Chawton House Library, having been much rebuilt by Blomfield after a fire in March 1871. Those of you who are familiar with the Mellichamp picture of Chawton House that hangs in the Tapestry Gallery will be aware that previously the church was more modest in form.

By the time of Domesday, the manor of Chawton had been granted to the de Port/de St John family. An Inquest Post Mortem into the estate of Robert de St John in 1266 mentions the sum of 52s payable to '*the chapel within the court of the manor*'. This was said to be the '*free Chappel of St Laurence*,' which had been founded and endowed by Sir Robert and had the same dedication as the parish church of nearby Alton<sup>1</sup>. Research done

by archaeologist Chris Currie<sup>2</sup> suggests that this chapel was not in the parish church but within the manor house complex.

It seems that the building was probably situated within a very short distance of the village church – so why was it built? One reason was given in the Inquest Post Mortem of John de St John dated 1302<sup>3</sup> where it was explained that the chapel was '*for the celebration of divine service there for the souls of himself [Robert de St John] and his ancestors for ever*'. Having a place of worship close at hand would also have been expected by the royal visitors who stopped here during this period. The Calendars of Patent Rolls show that Henry II visited 22 times between 1229 and 1270 with Edward I and Edward II also stopping here. Chawton was about a day's ride from Winchester and a suitable place to break a journey to London.

Not much information has been found about the chapel although the names of a couple of the chaplains are recorded<sup>4</sup>. In 1322, Hugh Gille, '*chaplain of the chapel of the Lord John de St John of Chawton*' was mentioned



in a deed and, 14 years later, there was a *'Grant for life to Geoffrey Gabrial, chaplain, of the free chapel of Chauton, in the king's gift by reason of his custody of the lands and heir of Hugh de Sancto Johanne, tenant in chief'*. Shortly after this, a sum of money was assigned *'for making a certain chantry in the Chapel built within the Manor'*.

By 1458, Chawton had come into the hands of John Bonville who held, amongst other things, the *'advowson of Chawton and the free Chapel there'*. No names of the priests were mentioned although, in 1535, Thomas Wemme was the Rector as well as the *'Chantry Priest of the free Chappel or Chantry of Chawton'*. Chawton had changed and, instead of being host to nobles and royalty, it was leased out to the Knight family who were local yeoman farmers. When they bought the house and manor in 1578, they began to alter and rebuild after which all evidence of the *'chapel within the court of the manor'* seems to have vanished.

As was seen above, Chawton also had a parish church and Hugh Gille/Gylle, who was the chantry priest in 1322, was admitted to *'the vacant Church of St Faith Chautone at presentation of the patron John de St John, knight'* in 1333<sup>6</sup>.

This church does not seem to have had the right to bury in a burial ground although parishioners could, for a fee, be interred inside the church. Those who did not choose this were taken to Alton, the neighbouring market town, to be buried. Evidence for this comes from early Chawton wills<sup>7</sup> where people asked to be placed *'in the churche earth of Alton'* (1562 A28), *'buried in the Churche yorde of Alton'* (1584 A44), and *'I wyll and do geve to be dystributyd a many the poore people in Aulton at my buryall vjs viijd'* (1558 U7) or to be buried in the parish church of Chawton (1561 A49) or within Chawton Church (1594 A76).

The first baptisms to be recorded in the Chawton parish register<sup>8</sup> were dated 1596 but the first burials, except for twins who were baptised 1 Dec 1598 and immediately after buried, were: -18 April 1602, *'being a Sunday John Hickman dying of a consumption was buried at Alton'* and 30 May 1602, *'Martha Knight the daughter of John Knight the salter was buried at Alton. She died suddenly in childbed.'*

In the same year, there was the consecration of church and burial ground at Chawton at the request of Nicholas Love, Rector of Chawton<sup>9</sup>, *'as the burial ground at Alton was one mile away'*. Was this the point at which the dedication of the church changed from St Faith to St Nicholas? Was it just a coincidence that the new Rector was Nicholas Love and/or the Lord of the Manor's late father had been Nicholas Knight?

And what had happened to St Faith, the girl martyr of Aquitaine? Was this dedication thought not to be suitable for the new religion - the Abbey at Conques in France was dedicated to her and crusaders and pilgrims going to the shrine of St James at Compostella invoked her intercession? ●

The heraldic stained glass windows in the Long Gallery at Chawton House Library show the coats of arms of successive freeholders, starting with the St John family (although the first owner at the time of William the Conqueror was Hugh de Port, whose great-grandson married a St John Heiress) and ending with the Knights.



We think it's fascinating to think that former Kings of England worshipped within the manor grounds where Chawton House Library now stands, and we were unaware that St Nicholas Church was once the Church of St Faith. Saint Faith, or Sainte Foy in her native France, is said to have been a young girl or woman of Agen in Aquitaine, who was tortured to death for refusing to make Pagan sacrifices – a victim of Christian persecution by the Roman Empire. The reliquary holding the remains of Saint Faith was one of the most famous in Europe – so famous indeed that it was stolen by a Monk from Conques and brought to the abbatial church there from Agen during the ninth century, to attract more wealth and visitors. The cult of Saint Faith brought many pilgrims to pray before her relics on the route to the shrine of St James at Compostella – one of the most important Christian Pilgrimages during the Middle Ages. Perhaps, in this period of reformation, this dedication was deemed unsuitable for the new religion, with its emphasis on glory to God alone.

At present, we can only speculate on the answers to these questions but the joy of history is that, through continual research, there are always new discoveries like these to be unearthed.

<sup>1</sup> William Austen Leigh and Montagu George Knight, *Chawton Manor and its Owners*, (Smith, Elder & Co., 1911).

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Currie, *Archaeological and historical survey of the landscape of Chawton Estate, near Alton, to AD1700*, (Hampshire Record Office 94M95/1, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> William Austen Leigh and Montagu George Knight, *Chawton Manor and its Owners*, (Smith, Elder & Co., 1911).

<sup>4</sup> John Coates, *St Nicholas Church, Chawton; A Chronicle covering Seven Centuries*, (privately published, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> The National Archives E1101/75/14.

<sup>6</sup> John Coates, *St Nicholas Church, Chawton; A Chronicle covering Seven Centuries*, (privately published, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> Available at the Hampshire Record Office.

<sup>8</sup> Hampshire Record Office 1M70/PR1.

<sup>9</sup> J E H Spaul, *Reformation in the Winchester Diocese of Winchester 1530-1616*, (Hampshire Record Office, unpublished typescript); Register of Thomas Bilson, (Hampshire Record Office 21M65/A1/29).

# ‘Courage, creativity and persistence’

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**P**AMELA HOLMES, WINNER OF THE JANE AUSTEN SHORT STORY COMPETITION IN 2014 AND AUTHOR OF *THE HUNTINGFIELD PAINTRESS*, EXPLORES THE OBSTACLES OVERCOME BY WOMEN WRITERS AND ARTISTS THROUGHOUT THE PERIOD OF THE LIBRARY COLLECTION AND BEYOND.

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Part of the prize for winning the Jane Austen Short Story competition in 2014 was to spend a week at Chawton House Library. I settled down in the beautiful book-lined reading room with anticipation but soon found myself overwhelmed by the prospect. Where was I to start? So many authors and books to choose from; what could I hope to achieve in a week? In the end, the *Bloomsbury Guide to Women's Literature* helped me to find books by or concerning authors, poets, diarists and playwrights about whom I'd heard but knew little. These included Mary Robinson, Anna Letitia Barbauld, Aphra Behn, Frances Burney and Eliza Haywood. I absorbed myself in the range and talent of these women, their views and voices, as well as reading commentators and academics who deepened my appreciation of these pioneering artists.

I was in the middle of writing my first novel at the time. Based on the life of Mildred Holland who single-handedly created a medieval ceiling in the Huntingfield parish church in the 1860s, this vicar's wife was also a pioneer of her time, I realised. But how did Mildred's experience equate with the Library's women writers? It's a point that has been explored by Dr Emma Barker in her work, and in a lecture at the Library on 29 September this year. Dr Barker argues that, during Jane Austen's time, it was much more difficult for a woman to become an artist than a writer. In her view, women were largely excluded from the institutions of the art world, despite the fact that some succeeded in making a career and a name for themselves. It's true that Mildred was working some years later than the artists discussed by Dr Barker but I suspect social attitudes would not have changed much. Women were regarded as the guardians of the domestic space with little or no role outside the home. A wife's desires, it was supposed, were to be channelled into marriage and motherhood. She must carefully balance self-assertion and independence, and be mindful not to call

into question her husband's authority or flout convention. For a vicar's wife, the restrictions were even more severe; the expectations of compliance to the norm even higher.

Mildred's ceiling can be seen today in St Mary's Church, Huntingfield, in Suffolk. A pound coin slipped into the wall meter causes an explosion of light above the visitor's head. For six years, Mildred stood or lay on her back on scaffolding to paint a fresco of saints, apostles and inscriptions in extravagant colour and gold leaf over the church's chancel and nave. Winged, crowned and carved angels leap from the roof beam ends. It is an extravagant and extraordinary sight.

But what inspired her? Waiting for the 'living' at St Mary's to become vacant, we know that Mildred and her vicar husband William had spent eight years travelling on the Continent. They would have visited medieval churches, castles, museums and palaces, absorbing the influences of art and culture from Paris to Italy, Constantinople to Morocco. Because we know that Mildred painted the ceiling, we can assume she was good at drawing and would have made sketches of what she saw. Surely this would have fed her imagination, given her ideas for religious expression?

But her work also built on William's obsession. He was a committed Tractarian, part of the Oxford Movement which started at the University he attended in the 1830s. Led by Edward Pusey, John Henry Newman and John Keble, the Movement argued for a return to early Christian practices of worship and the restoration of the High Church ideals of the seventeenth century as a way of encouraging congregations back to worship. In short, more beauty, pomp and ceremony in churches and in services. When William and Mildred moved to Huntingfield in 1848, the little stone church



was in a state of dilapidation. Like many across England, it had been vandalised, either during the Reformation or later by puritan iconoclasts like William Dowsing who was in the pay of Oliver Cromwell. Dowsing was commissioned to destroy religious icons and artefacts in over 250 churches across Suffolk and Cambridgeshire.

As a Tractarian, William would have been determined to return his parish church to its former glory. We know he paid for the work. Like many Chawton writers who were helped by their fathers, brothers and/or husbands to access learning and books, Mildred was supported by the man in her life.

She would have needed his support too in the face of disapproval from locals and others who may have questioned why this woman must interfere in their church. Concerns would have been raised about the appropriateness of a woman undertaking physically-demanding





Mildred Holland's extraordinary ceiling can still be seen at St Mary's Church, Huntingfield, Suffolk.

work and William may well have been subjected to ridicule (could he not control his wife?) or veiled hints about Mildred.

Painting a church ceiling demands practical solutions; one of those is scaffolding. Mildred would have climbed several ladders to access a structure tall enough to reach different parts of the 70-foot-high ceiling. How would she have coped in the usual attire of a Victorian woman – tight-laced corsets and petticoats? In my book, I suggest she dealt with the pragmatic need for dignity and warmth with a characteristic of all women artists, bloody-mindedness. I imagine the scene in the local tailor's shop:

*'I need a pair of trousers, Mr Edwards. For myself.'*

*The tailor didn't reply. He was standing some distance from her but even in the low light she could see embarrassment spread like a stain up his neck. The man shifted on his feet and rubbed his jaw.*

*'A pair that a man would use for working. That would suit me.'*

And then the reaction of his wife.

*'We've heard your plan,' said Mrs Edwards gruffly and stood close to where Mildred sat. No taller than Mildred's shoulder, she blazed bitterness. 'But why would you do it?' It was a question that expected and would receive no answer. It hung on the air like a dead weight.*

My week in the Library helped me to see the many links between the women writers in the collection and Mildred Holland: courage, creativity and persistence to name but a few. My stay there gave me the evidence and confidence to create what I hope is a psychologically-consistent portrait of why a woman artist was driven to express herself in paint. What I know is that women artists in every era face social disapproval so they must find the dogged determination and persistence within themselves to see their work through. ●



The Huntingfield Paintress is published by Urbane Publications and is available from the Chawton House Library Gift Shop for the special price of £6.99 (usual price £8.99). To order your copy, call 01420 541010. Find out more about Pamela and her work at [www.pamela-holmes.com](http://www.pamela-holmes.com).



# Did You Know?

**A**S EXPLAINED BY Pamela Holmes in her article about the 'Huntingfield Paintress', and by Dr Emma Barker in her talk at the Library, during Jane Austen's time it was much more difficult for a woman to become an artist than a writer.

An example of a woman artist who experienced this challenge is the Italian-English artist Maria Cosway (1760-1838) whose portrait hangs in our Oak Room (the portrait is believed to be Maria Cosway by a painter in the circle of Richard Cosway). Maria Cosway's history paintings and character portraits were highly regarded, with more than 30 of her works being displayed at the Royal Academy of Art from 1781 to 1801.

However, her status as an artist was limited by the refusal of her husband, the artist Richard Cosway, to allow her to sell her paintings. 'Had Mr. C. permitted me to paint professionally,' she wrote, 'I should have made a better painter.' Her *Self-Portrait with Arms Folded* (1787) is seen as a response to this curtailment of her work.

Maria and her husband Richard developed a fashionable salon for London society and, speaking several languages and spending time in France and Italy, Maria developed an international circle of friends. Following a brief romantic relationship in 1786, Maria maintained a lifelong correspondence with Thomas Jefferson.

In later life, and in common with many intellectual women of the age, she turned her energies to education, establishing and running two girls' schools: the first in Lyon, France and the second in Lodi, Italy which she ran until her death in 1838. ●



The small painting thought to be Maria Cosway, by an artist in the circle of Richard Cosway, hangs in our Oak Room.



Maria Cosway's *Self-Portrait with Arms Folded* (1787) is thought to express her frustration at her husband's limitation of her work.



The original *Female Spectator* made a bold statement in its day. © Chawton House Library

## 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*, written by and for men – was the first magazine by and for women, and 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. ●

**W**e would like to thank and welcome two new Anne Radcliffe Preserver Friends: Sandra Magnuson and Professor Deirdre Lynch.

ISSN 1746-8604

Registered Charity Number 1026921  
Registered Company Number 2851718

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