

A brief introduction to Chawton House and Jane Austen's House

two worlds which Jane Austen brought together



The Wellings silhouette

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Towards the end of the eighteenth century, Thomas and Catherine Knight needed a suitable boy to adopt and make their heir. He would inherit their Chawton estate which had been in the Knight family for over two hundred years, and the more recently acquired (even grander!) Godmersham Park estate. The childless couple eventually chose Edward Austen, third son of the vicar of Steventon, George Austen. George was a distant relative of Thomas, and his parish lay within the Knight estate, a few miles from Chawton itself. The Wellings silhouette of 1783 commemorates young Edward's adoption. It shows Edward (in the middle) being presented to Catherine Knight by his father while Thomas Knight and his sister watch (from the right).

Much later, the mature Edward was able to offer his by then widowed mother and two sisters a permanent home on one of his estates. In 1809, they chose to live in Chawton village and

their house, one of many properties on the Chawton estate, became the Austen women's simple yet beloved dwelling. They were also welcome at the great manor house under a mile away, where Edward or his brothers or well-born tenants might be in temporary residence from time to time. They also often visited the Godmersham Park Estate, where Edward and his family resided for the majority of each year.

The Chawton Manor House is now a library dedicated to the study of work written mainly by English women between 1600 and 1830. The tenanted cottage where Jane Austen lived is now The Jane Austen's House museum. Both these worlds – that of genteel poverty (the cottage) and of land-owning wealth (the manor house) were astutely observed by Jane, the younger of Edward's two unmarried sisters. She was a little-known writer back then, but she is now widely acknowledged as the second most read author in English after Shakespeare.

Jane Austen's House. Now known as 'Jane Austen's House Museum'



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Chawton House Library

10 Key Facts about Jane Austen's House



1 The house has been open to the public since 1949, dedicated to the memory of Philip John Carpenter who died fighting in Italy in June 1944.

2 The seventeenth century building may once have been an alehouse and posting inn before serving as the farm bailiff's cottage.

3 Edward gave his family more privacy in their new home by replacing the road-facing front window with one overlooking the side garden.

4 Early every morning, Jane Austen played the drawing room's piano, similar to the one on show here. She sometimes read from the music which she had copied out meticulously.

5 Jane Austen's first household task of the day was to take charge of the tea and coffee, kept in a locked cupboard beside the fireplace.



6 Mrs Austen and her daughters created a patchwork quilt together which, along with other examples of fine needlework, can be seen at the house.



7 The three Austen women, with their friend Martha Lloyd, could use the donkey carriage, still to be seen in the Bakehouse, for local trips and visits.



8 Jane Austen used her last seven and a half years at the house to revise the novels she had already written and to create three more.

9 Cassandra, the last survivor of the three Austen women, was grateful to Edward because she was able to live on in the house until her death in 1845.

10 The average number of visitors to Jane Austen's House in a year is over 30,000. They come from all over the world.

