

JANE AUSTEN'S HOUSE MUSEUM

REVIEW OF 2019 – CELEBRATING 70 YEARS

The purpose of this report is to summarise some of the highlights and achievements at Jane Austen's House in 2019. It sits alongside the formal published Annual Report and Accounts for 2019 which are submitted to the Charity Commission and can be viewed [here](#).

Our public programme in 2019 centred on commemorating and celebrating the 70th anniversary of the opening of Jane Austen's House to the public. We particularly wanted to mark the unique contribution of the Carpenter family; T Edward Carpenter had purchased the house and then devoted the rest of his life to leading and championing the Museum.

The display *Making the Museum* took the form of a trail throughout the House and outbuildings, and showcased objects from the Museum's history as well as more recent acquisitions, press cuttings and archive material.

During the year we continued to offer a varied programme of public events and activities. These included a professional development conference held off-site at Charleston House, East Sussex, which we hosted, featuring several speakers on the presentation of literary house museums.

In July we held a public 'birthday party' to celebrate our 70th anniversary, featuring Regency music and dancing. This was a very happy occasion and we were additionally delighted to welcome, as our guests, Pam and Tom Barbour. Extraordinarily, Pam had been born in the house – in fact in Jane's bedroom – during the Second World War and it was fascinating to hear her very clear recollections of life at the house both when it was privately occupied and in its early years as a museum.



Other events across the year included three creative writing workshops, led by professional writers; three guided walks led by the Learning Officer; two 'Director's Evening Talk and Tour' events; and other one-off talks and events.

We continue to acquire relevant examples of material relating to Jane including her letters. Following a highly successful public fund-raising appeal, we acquired 'letter fragment 112' which was written by Jane in November 1814 whilst she was living at Chawton. This joins our existing collection of 12 of her letters which are exhibited on a rotational basis.

For 2019, writer and comedian David Baddiel agreed to act as Ambassador for Jane Austen's House. His involvement took the form of social media and press.

We were pleased to continue our partnership with Harkness Roses when a delightful new climbing rose *Chawton Cottage* was launched at the prestigious international Chelsea Flower Show in May. This follows on the huge success of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Jane Austen*. We receive a financial donation from Harkness on each of these roses sold. Alan Titchmarsh, who lives locally and is a longstanding JAH supporter, again visited later in the year to plant a specimen in the garden.



We continued to work closely with our near neighbour, Chawton House, offering discount on admission to those visiting both houses and a special joint ticket for visitors on Jane Austen's birthday on December 16th.

The annual Pathfinders visit of members of the Jane Austen Society of North America (JASNA) took place in July 2019 and we were pleased to welcome our American friends.

In October 2019 two trustees, the Director and another volunteer attended the Annual General Meeting of JASNA in Colonial Williamsburg, USA, where the latter two gave presentations relating to the Museum.



We were very pleased to introduce a third set of replica wallpapers which were derived from original fragments found in specific rooms. This latest fragment had been found in a cupboard within the Dining Room and, following research by specialists Hamilton Weston, a beautiful new replica was produced and then hung and unveiled in September.

We participated in a scheme to enhance the appearance of the underpass providing pedestrian access between nearby Alton and Chawton village and which is used by many visitors and locals. A series of quotations from Jane's novels and letters has been beautifully etched on one of the walls covering the length of the underpass; this has proved a great success and engendered many positive comments.

A volunteer recognition scheme was commissioned during 2019 and will be launched early 2020 with bronze, silver and gold awards related to length of service to JAH. A comprehensive Stewards' Handbook was compiled by a volunteer to support others by answering frequently asked questions about Jane Austen, the Austen family and the House itself.

Work continued to provide digital access to our collection, and to this end a new "Treasures from the Collection" page was launched on our website, showcasing 50 items from the collection. The intention is to build this in the next few years.

During 2019 we continued to provide a varied education programme and drop-in activities for schools, colleges and visiting families. The needs of particular educational groups are met through tailored sessions.

In December 2019 Mary Guyatt, our Director for six very successful years, left for a new position at the Houses of Parliament. Recruitment for a new Director commenced at the end of the year (and was successfully concluded in early 2020).

During the year the charity had 21 staff and 63 volunteers, the equivalent to 13 full time staff. We received a total of nearly 39,000 visitors during 2019, a slight reduction on the previous year.



We are enormously grateful to our staff and volunteers for all that they do in many critical areas in helping us to share the legacy and spirit of Jane Austen with friends and supporters drawn from all round the world.

Martyn Dell
Trustee