

A CHAWTON CELEBRATION

Wednesday 13 September

Councillor Brian Dutton, Chairman of East Hampshire District Council, today ceremoniously cuts the ribbon to celebrate the re-hanging and conservation of the original ornamental wrought iron gates to the Walled Garden at Chawton House.

These were installed by Montagu Knight circa 1905 when he converted the kitchen garden to an ornamental flower garden, but are of a very much earlier period. They are an extremely beautiful example of repoussé work with scrolls embossed with leaves, roses and other flowers, topped by a coronet and two dragons. The restoration work on the gates which has cost approx £9,000 was carried out by Ian Clark. Chawton House is grateful to the generous donors who have made this restoration possible.

Jane Austen's brother, Edward, inherited the Chawton House estate in 1794 having been adopted by Austen cousins, Thomas and Catherine Knight, who were childless. He decided to build a new walled garden and we know from Jane's letters that she was involved with the plans. However these did not come to fruition until after her death in 1817. This was a kitchen garden with fruit trees on all the inner walls and on the outer sides of the south and east walls and with hard and soft fruits within. The garden was fully enclosed by malmstone and brick walls with small doorways in each wall.

Edward's grandson, Montagu Knight, converted the kitchen garden to an ornamental flower garden, influenced by his friend, Sir Edwin Lutyens. Around 1905 he introduced an additional inner wall, with the ornamental iron gates in the centre and also formed a larger opening in the outer west wall. During the 20th century, the herbaceous borders were grassed over and the garden turned into an orchard.

Since 1997, a major restoration programme has been taking place to restore the walled garden as much as possible in accordance with Edward Austen Knight's scheme. The inside walls are planted with soft fruit trees and the central space is used for the production of vegetables, herbs, flowers and hard fruit trees. Chawton House now enjoys full accreditation by the Soil Association and supplies the house for conferences, lunches and dinners as well as providing produce locally.

We are delighted to be taking part in Councillor Brian Dutton's Civic Day by welcoming the Mayors, Councillors and Chairman of the other local authorities in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. Heather Shearer, Director of Chawton House Library, said: "Having the gates back in place really does bring the Walled Garden to life and Councillor Dutton's Civic Day seems the perfect opportunity for us to celebrate their return".

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The programme for the afternoon is as follows:

- 2.30pm Guests arrive and are welcomed by the Director of Chawton House Library, Heather Shearer, and Trustee, Mrs. Gilly Drummond, before touring the house and having tea.
- 4.00pm Councillor Brian Dutton formally opens the gates to the Walled Kitchen Garden. Wine and canapés to be served in the Walled Garden.

For further information, please contact:

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NOTES FOR EDITORS:

- Repoussé work, a Baroque style of ironwork, was introduced to this country by Jean Tijou, a master smith who came to England c.1685 from his native France. This unique style depended upon a composition of leaves and flowers wrought from sheet iron, providing a solid element to contrast with routine scrollwork, and composed in an ordered, symmetrical fashion. The use of sheet iron was a major innovation and required the hammering of a pattern in relief on to the sheet, known as repoussé work, or embossing. This was then embedded face down on to an asphalt block and hammered cold on the reverse side to raise the ornament, and then turned over and the background hammered back. The design would then be finished by applying chased ornament, sharpening up the detail.
- Chawton House is a research library with a unique collection of books focusing on women's writing in English from 1600 - 1830. This specialist collection, set in the home and working estate of Jane Austen's brother, provides the opportunity to study and savour the texts in their original setting and inspires passion in readers of all ages.
- The Chawton Estate has been closely connected with the Knight family since the early 16th century. Chawton House was built in 1583 by John Knight and passed by inheritance to Jane Austen's brother, Edward, on the death of childless cousin, Thomas Knight in 1794. Jane, her mother and her sister subsequently moved to a house in Chawton village, now Jane Austen's House Museum. Edward himself later changed his surname to Knight.
- In 1987, the house was inherited by Richard Knight, but was by then in such a dilapidated state that radical action was required. In 1993, following the failure of a plan to convert the estate to a country club and golf course, the American philanthropist, Sandy Lerner, acquired a 125-year lease for the purpose of forming a library and study centre based on her collection of 7,000 works by women writing in English before 1830. Following ten years of meticulous research, planning and restoration work, Chawton House Library opened as a research library and study centre in July 2003.
- Chawton House Library is a registered charity (registration number 1026921)
- Website: www.chawton.org