

# Rare chance to bid for unique UK heritage experiences – and support Chawton House Library

From 11<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> October 2007, Chawton House Library will be participating in an exciting new initiative: **TopLots – the first eBay auction of its kind** where the UK's museums, galleries and heritage attractions go online with unique experiences and 'behind the scenes' activities up for grabs!

Around 200 lots featuring a whole range of experiences from the UK's extraordinarily diverse heritage sector will be available on eBay from 1 October for 3 weeks only. Museums large and small, historic houses and heritage properties from all regions are participating. Privileged access, exclusive experiences, and unique memories to treasure will be on offer – ideal gifts for enthusiasts with a passion for their subjects and unusual corporate events and family outings

Chawton House Library will be taking part with a very special experience day 'in the footsteps of Jane Austen' in TopLots. This special day will be auctioned with NO RESERVE and NO STARTING BID, so someone could snap up a real bargain. The day includes an exclusive guided tour of the library and the house, including rooms which are never opened to the public. The house dates back to the 16th century and has a fascinating history, including once being the home of Jane Austen's brother, which she would have visited often and is mentioned in her letters. The winning bidder will also be able to see Jane's only complete manuscript to have survived from her adult years, a rare treat because it is so fragile that it is only brought out three times a year to protect it from over-handling and exposure to light.

The visitor and their guest will also enjoy lunch in the Dining Room, at the table where Jane herself would have sat and afternoon tea in the Ladies' Withdrawing Room, enjoying panoramic views of the landscape which has been restored to how it would have been in Jane Austen's time. The day will be finished with a walk around the gardens, taking in the walled kitchen garden which Jane's brother designed and other traditional areas such as the 'ha-ha' and the 'wilderness.'

The full list of lots and details is on [www.toplots.co.uk](http://www.toplots.co.uk) and there is also a link to the Chawton House Library Lot on their website at [www.chawtonhouse.org](http://www.chawtonhouse.org).

How to bid:

- Register on [www.toplots.co.uk](http://www.toplots.co.uk) to be reminded of the auction start, and browse the growing list of lots
- Set up an eBay account (if you haven't already got one) at [www.ebay.co.uk](http://www.ebay.co.uk)
- Log on to [www.ebay.co.uk/toplots](http://www.ebay.co.uk/toplots) regularly during October - individual lots will be on for 10 days only, so you'll need to keep checking to avoid missing our lot.

TopLots is all in a very good cause. Thanks to eBay for Charity the money generated by the bids will come straight back to us (less a small admin charge) to help with our work.

The **TopLots** heritage auction is run in partnership between eBay, the Association for Independent Museums and UK heritage fundraising specialists, Development Partners, working closely with VisitBritain and EnjoyEngland. The aim is to generate vital new funds for the participating museums, galleries and heritage properties – all not-for-profit organisations.

#### **NOTES FOR EDITORS:**

- 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](http://www.chawton.org)

#### **Further information from:**

Susie Grandfield, Public Relations Officer, or Helen Thirlway, Fundraising Manager,  
Chawton House Library, on 01420 541010  
[susie.grandfield@chawton.net](mailto:susie.grandfield@chawton.net)

