

# JANE AUSTEN'S ASSOCIATION WITH ROWLANDS CASTLE

Mary Cowin tells us of the fascinating links between one of Britain's favourite authors, and our village:

"Last September, the Rowlands Castle Historical Society made visits to Chawton Manor at Chawton, near Alton. This Elizabethan manor house was inherited by Jane Austen's brother, Edward, in 1809 on condition that he changed his name to Knight. Not surprisingly he agreed to this having been adopted by the Knight family as a youth.

Once installed in the Manor, he placed his mother Cassandra and two sisters, Jane and Cassandra, in the bailiff's cottage, about half a mile away which is now the Jane Austen Museum. It was here that Jane wrote many of her famous works.

Both Cassandras are buried in the churchyard at Chawton, close to the Manor.

Two hundred years later, the Manor, though Grade II listed, was in a dilapidated state of decay. It has now been rescued by an American millionairess, Sandy Lerner, an internet pioneer, and an avid collector of books by female authors.

Sandy donated some £10m for the restoration of the Manor, and founded a library to house her collection of some 6,000 rare books written by women writers before 1830.

The Manor has now been renamed the Chawton House Library & Centre and is dedicated to the study of Early English Women's writing from 1600 – 1830.

The house has been beautifully restored and furnished and the grounds relandscaped. Visits can be made by appointment only.

The Historical Society invited the then director of Chawton Manor, Jane Alderson (another JA!), to talk to them before they visited Chawton. She has now moved on to another position.

So, what is the connection with Austen and Rowlands Castle? Another of her brothers, Francis Austen, served in the Royal Navy and was one of Nelson's captains at the time of the Battle of Trafalgar, although he missed the actual battle itself! He eventually rose to the dizzy heights of Admiral of the Fleet. Francis lived for some years at Wymering, Paulsgrove and had 11 children. His third son, George, was born on 20th October, 1812. Like his grandfather, the Reverend George Austen, he also went into the church and served as a Royal Naval Chaplain from 1837. Latterly, he served as incumbent of St John the Baptist, Rowlands Castle for 41 years from 1856-1897 (the majority of time as Rector). He is buried, along with other members of his family behind the new church hall, in a dark corner, by the hedge.



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