

**HRH THE EARL OF WESSEX OFFICIALLY OPENS LANDMARK JANE AUSTEN EXHIBITION
AT WINCHESTER DISCOVERY CENTRE**



HRH The Earl of Wessex opens *The Mysterious Miss Austen*

***The Mysterious Miss Austen*, a landmark exhibition exploring the author's life, work and relationship to Hampshire, was officially opened on Thursday 18 May by HRH The Earl of Wessex at The Gallery in Winchester Discovery Centre.**

During his visit to The Gallery, the Earl was given a guided tour of the exhibition by staff from Hampshire Cultural Trust, who are staging the exhibition and coordinating Jane Austen 200, a year-long, county-wide series of events commemorating the 200th anniversary of the author's death.

At the centre of *The Mysterious Miss Austen* are six portraits of the author, all together under one roof for the very first time. Included in these is a rarely seen 1869 watercolour portrait of Jane Austen by James Andrews. The work is currently in a private collection, and the likeness that will feature on the new £10 note from July 2017 is based on this portrait. The exhibition also includes around 50 items all generously loaned from private and public collections in the UK and abroad, as well as Austen's silk pelisse coat, one of a handful of items that survive today which actually belonged to Jane and can be traced directly back to her.

As well as officially opening the exhibition by signing a visitor book, The Earl announced the winners of the Jane Austen 200 Short Story Competition. The competition, launched in October of last year, invited entrants to write a short story of up to 2017 words based on a quote from Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, 'Selfishness must always be forgiven, you know, because there is no hope of a cure.' Over 281 entries were received from all over the world, and the winning story was penned by Sally Tissington, who teaches creative writing modules at the University of Warwick. Both Sally's story, and that by runner-up, Ingrid Jendrzejewski, can be read in full at www.janeausten200.co.uk.

Janet Owen, Chief Executive of Hampshire Cultural Trust, commented:

'We are both thrilled and honoured to have had the opportunity to welcome HRH The Earl of Wessex to open our *The Mysterious Miss Austen* exhibition. We are especially delighted that the visitor book signed by him will be available at The Gallery for visitors to sign and leave their own comments on this landmark exhibition celebrating the creativity and talent of Hampshire's own Jane Austen.'

The Earl also visited Hampshire Cultural Trust's *Jane's Winchester: Malady and Medicine* exhibition in City Space at Winchester Discovery Centre. This show offers a vivid snapshot of Winchester in 1817, the year that Jane travelled to the city to receive treatment for what would be her final illness. Key objects on display include a rare surviving sedan chair used by patients attending the Winchester hospitals, a set of apothecary's drawers of the period and other Regency medical equipment from pill pots to surgical instruments. It also looks at her depiction of illness and treatment in her books.

Eloise Appleby, Assistant Director (Economy and Communities) at Winchester City Council, said:

'Jane Austen has enduring appeal, and is still one of the most important elements in our flourishing visitor economy. We have thrown ourselves into the bicentenary celebrations, notably with our innovative Rain Jane visitor trail of inspiring quotations. We are delighted at the royal recognition of the exhibitions, which would probably have surprised Jane if she had been here today: congratulations to the Trust for an excellent programme of events in 2017.'

At the end of his visit, The Earl was presented with a copy of *Jane Austen, Writer in the World* a book by Dr Kathryn Sutherland of Oxford University, who co-curated *The Mysterious Miss Austen* with Louise West, formerly curator of Jane Austen's House Museum in Chawton.

The Leader of Hampshire County Council, Councillor Roy Perry, said: 'We are immensely proud of Jane Austen's Hampshire heritage. She lived in the county for much of her life and wrote many of her world famous novels here including *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma* and

Sense and Sensibility – revealing intriguing insights into what life was like in Hampshire two centuries ago.

‘This is a landmark exhibition at Winchester Discovery Centre, and we’ve been delighted to work closely with Jane Austen 200 partners, including Hampshire Cultural Trust, to host a number of bicentenary celebrations so that visitors from around the world can enjoy exploring Jane Austen’s life and times.’

The Mysterious Miss Austen runs until 24 July, the 200th anniversary of Jane Austen’s funeral and burial at Winchester Cathedral.