



## **The Mysterious Miss Austen**

**13 May – 24 July 2017, The Gallery, Winchester Discovery Centre**

2017 marks the 200th anniversary of the death of the universally admired author Jane Austen – and Hampshire Cultural Trust is coordinating a yearlong series of events to celebrate her creativity and talent.

The centrepiece of the celebrations is the exhibition *The Mysterious Miss Austen*, which opens on 13 May 2017 (until 24 July) at The Gallery in Winchester Discovery Centre.

Presented in partnership with Jane Austen's House Museum, this landmark exhibition will explore Jane's life, work and her relationship to Hampshire. The county was not only Jane Austen's birthplace (and where you can visit her grave today), but its people, landscape and the society in which she moved provided inspiration for her novels, classics such as *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, *Mansfield Park* and *Sense and Sensibility*.

The exhibition will include around 80 items, including paintings, watercolours, prints, illustrations, manuscripts, letters, clothing and other objects – all generously loaned from private and public collections in the UK and abroad.

The centrepiece of *The Mysterious Miss Austen* will be five portraits of Jane together under one roof for the very first time. The pencil and watercolour sketch of Jane (featured above) by her sister Cassandra Austen (circa 1810) and the hollow cut silhouette by an unknown artist from circa 1810-15 will be familiar to many from their usual home in the National Portrait Gallery, London. However the three other portraits, all from private collections, will probably not be known to visitors: one has not been seen in public for more than 40 years; another is the 1869 James Andrews watercolour over pencil portrait of the author, made famous after her nephew's biography of his aunt, published in 1870.

Among other treasures on show in *The Mysterious Miss Austen* will be the manuscript of an alternative ending to her final novel *Persuasion* in her own hand, on loan from the British Library. *Persuasion*, which deals with love lost and second chances, was written in 1815/16 when Austen's health was failing (it was published posthumously in 1818). The two chapters which will be on display in Hampshire are unique as the only surviving manuscript pages of a novel Jane Austen planned and completed for publication. She subsequently became dissatisfied with this first ending and rewrote the chapters in the published form we have them today. But this first ending offers visitors a chance to glimpse in intimate detail the novelist at work.

Another manuscript on loan from The British Library is a volume of teenage writings, entitled by Austen *Volume the Second* and written when she was just 16 years old. Among the items in *Volume the Second* is the spoof *History of England*, a comic account of England from Henry IV to Charles I as told by 'a partial, prejudiced, & ignorant historian.' This parody of published history books includes coloured illustrations by Jane's sister Cassandra.

There are only a handful of items that survive today which actually belonged to Jane and can be traced directly back to her – and Hampshire Cultural Trust is fortunate to have three in the collections it cares for. The exhibition will feature her silk pelisse coat – a twill weave with a small repeated pattern of oak leaves in a golden straw colour on a warm brown background (the design dates it circa 1813-15). *The Mysterious Miss Austen* will also include her purse and her case for sewing materials.

Other fascinating loans include a rare, photo-illustrated copy of American writer Oscar Fay Adams *Story of Jane Austen* from 1897 which is travelling to Winchester from Goucher College, Baltimore along with other items from its Jane Austen Memorabilia Collection. A Friendship Book belonging to Rev. James Stanier Clarke, the Librarian of the Prince Regent (later King George IV), and an acquaintance of Jane's contains an 1815 portrait some believe to be of the author (the fifth portrait in the exhibition). First editions of her works and fascinating personal letters, early illustrations for her works and images of Winchester in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, plus items of the kind Jane would have experienced in her day to day life will all complete this fascinating survey of the renowned writer. Bringing a contemporary view, Grayson Perry's *Jane Austen in E17* ceramic vase (2009, Manchester City Art Gallery) is evidence of her lasting legacy and influence on the arts.

*The Mysterious Miss Austen* is jointly curated by Louise West, former curator of Jane Austen's House Museum and chair of the Jane Austen 200 working group, and Professor Kathryn Sutherland from Oxford University, a leading Austen scholar.

Louise West says "*The bringing together for the first time of 5 portraits of Jane Austen will, we hope, provoke reaction and excite argument, about the mysterious Miss Austen. This is a new way of exploring Austen's identity and we are thrilled to be sharing this opportunity with the public.*" Professor Kathryn Sutherland says "*If you think you know Jane Austen, think again! Jane Austen is our most intimate writer – the writer we each feel speaks to and for us – and yet we know so little about her. What we do know is built upon ambiguities, contradictions and paradox: even how she looked is something of a mystery. 'The Mysterious Miss Austen' will celebrate and challenge the reputation of our best-known, unknowable writer.*"

During 2017 there will also be smaller scale, sister exhibitions on the life and works of Jane Austen in Hampshire at the Gallery at Gosport Discovery Centre and the Sainsbury Gallery at Basingstoke's Willis Museum.

### ***Jane Austen in Basingstoke. Retail and Romance: Jane goes to the Ball***

**29 July - 7 October, The Sainsbury Gallery at the Willis Museum, Basingstoke**

Visitors to this exhibition may be surprised to learn that Jane Austen knew the town of Basingstoke well and attended dances in its Assembly Rooms. Austen wrote about the world she knew, and that most definitely included how one behaved at a ball, what one wore and what one ate – the gentry, the gowns and the gossip will all be explored in this exhibition. She was an avid consumer herself, and her letters evoke the period with descriptions of what she wore and when.

### ***The Navy at the Time of Jane Austen: Fighting, Flirting and Fortune***

**15 July – 20 September, The Gallery at Gosport Discovery Centre**

In her later novels, Jane Austen describes a new type of hero, one who has made his own fortune through hard work and intelligence. The inspiration for the naval officers in *Mansfield Park* and

*Persuasion* undoubtedly came from her brothers, Francis and Charles. Both already making names for themselves in their chosen careers, her brothers were on active service in this golden era of the British Navy - the victorious Battle of Trafalgar had been fought just a few short years before. *The Navy at the Time of Jane Austen* - fittingly on display at the port of Gosport - will look at the danger and the drama as well as the entertaining and social life aboard ship, through her novels, her letters and contemporary accounts.

Janet Owen, Chief Executive of Hampshire Cultural Trust, says "*Jane Austen has been a much loved figure worldwide for more than two centuries, so we are pulling out all the stops to celebrate her life and works here in Hampshire. Whether you are a Jane Austen scholar or have just enjoyed one of the many TV or film adaptations of her works, these exhibitions are an ideal way to explore and celebrate her legacy.*"

These exhibitions are just a small handful of the events taking place in Hampshire for Jane Austen 200, for the latest news and information visit [www.janeausten200.co.uk](http://www.janeausten200.co.uk)