

## NEWS RELEASE: EMBARGOED UNTIL SUNDAY 8th MARCH

### Vera Brittain to inspire new writing on women and war Charity launches six new writing and research fellowships

**Chawton, 8th March 2015.** Today on the fortieth anniversary of the first International Women's Day, Chawton House Library officially launches six new Visiting Fellowships aimed at promoting the study of women's writing. Attendees at the launch event include writer Kate Mosse, Vera Brittain's daughter, Shirley Williams, the RT Hon. Baroness Williams of Crosby, and the organisation's founder and Chairman, Dr Sandy Lerner, who co-founded Cisco Systems and created Urban Decay Cosmetics before setting up the UK registered charity.

The new Visiting Fellowships build on the Library's existing programme, in partnership with Southampton University, which enables researchers and writers to use the library collections and stay in onsite accommodation – a 'room of one's own' in this tranquil location – the village where Jane Austen was at her most creative as a writer. New opportunities include the Vera Brittain fellowship, which is open to academics, writers, journalists and independent scholars working on any aspect of women and warfare, in any historical period. This unique fellowship is sponsored by the Society of Women Writers & Journalists. Brittain's searing memoir of her experiences of the First World War *A Testament of Youth*, was recently made into a film starring Alicia Vikander and Kit Harington.

Speaking about the Fellowships, Dr Gillian Dow, the Library's Executive Director says, 'We believe this broad array of Fellowships will have a transformative effect on the study of women's writing, which has been woefully marginalised in the past.' The Library is a unique environment within which to study women's writing, having been the home of Jane Austen's brother, Edward, referred to in her letters as 'the great house'. Now an internationally-recognised research and study centre, the sensitively restored house and grounds retain features from Austen's time.

Chawton House Library's unique collection includes some 10,000 volumes and original manuscripts of early women writers. Earlier this year, the Library launched an appeal to help conserve its books, 75% of which need conservation work due to historic damage. The collection includes first editions of seminal works such as *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* by Mary Wollstonecraft, along with original manuscripts including *Sir Charles Grandison*, a play in five acts written in Jane Austen's own hand. The Library holds an astounding array of women's writing from poetry and memoirs, to history, travel, medicine, botany and cookery. Dr Dow adds: 'We are immensely proud of these Visiting Fellowships; they are unique in their scope and in the environment that we can provide.'

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#### NOTES TO EDITORS

**For more information or photographs contact:**

Shelley Hughes: [shelley.hughes@chawtonhouselibrary.org](mailto:shelley.hughes@chawtonhouselibrary.org) / 01420 595901

**About Chawton House Library ([www.chawtonhouselibrary.org](http://www.chawtonhouselibrary.org))**

Chawton House Library is one of the world's leading centres for the study of the lives and works of women writing in English between 1600 and 1830 and home to a unique collection of rare books and manuscripts.

Writers whose work is held in the collection include Jane Austen, Aphra Behn, Frances Burney, Mary Robinson, Mary Shelley, Frances Sheridan and Mary Wollstonecraft.

Chawton House Library opened as a UK-registered charity in 2003 after seven years of extensive restoration work on the historic house and gardens, which are open to visitors and sit within the South Downs National Park.

The house itself is more than 400 years old and its history is interwoven with the family story of Jane Austen, whose brother inherited the house in 1826 after being adopted in 1784 by the Knight family who owned the estate.

Chawton House Library enjoys close links with the University of Southampton and provides research facilities for their students studying for an MA in Eighteenth-Century Studies.

The charity also runs education and outreach services, offering educational visits to schools, colleges and universities. This includes working in partnership with the Jane Austen House Museum, also in Chawton, to provide Austen-themed visits to support school curriculums.

In 2007, both sites were awarded the Sandford Award for Heritage Education in recognition of their work.

### **About the Visiting Fellowships**

The new Visiting Fellowships, named in honour of women writers and/or the supporters who have made them possible and are to be taken up between October 2015 and August 2016. They are as follows:

#### **The Vera Brittain / Society of Women Writers & Journalists Fellowship**

Vera Brittain (1893-1970), writer, pacifist and memoirist, was an Honorary Life President of the Society of Women Writers and Journalists, which is supporting this one-month fellowship in her memory. Applications are welcomed from academics, writers, journalists and independent scholars working on any aspect of women and warfare, in any historical period.

#### **The Marilyn Butler Fellowship**

Professor Marilyn Butler (1937-2014), leading scholar of English literature, was the author of paradigm-shifting books and articles, and a patron of Chawton House Library. In the fortieth anniversary of the first publication of Butler's *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (1975), we invite applications from scholars at any stage of their research careers to apply for this one-month fellowship in her memory.

#### **The Hester Davenport / Burney Society Fellowship**

Hester Davenport (1936-2013), independent scholar and biographer, was the author of important and influential work on Frances Burney and Mary Robinson, including *Faithful Handmaid: Fanny Burney at the Court of George III* (2000) and *The Prince's Mistress: A Life of Mary Robinson* (2004). This one-month fellowship named in her honour, supported by the Burney Societies of the UK and North America in her

memory, will be awarded in preference for work on the Burney family and their circle, broadly defined.

**The Jane Austen Society of Japan Fellowship**

The Jane Austen Society of Japan focuses on the studies of the works of Jane Austen and on the literature and culture of her period. It celebrates its tenth anniversary in June 2016, and to celebrate the occasion welcomes applications for this one-month fellowship from members of the Society.

**The Yablon Fellowship for Brontë Studies**

2016 sees the bicentenary of the birth of Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855), the eldest of the writing dynasty that changed the landscape of the nineteenth-century English novel. Chawton House Library is home to an extensive collection of books by and about the Brontës as well as printed ephemera, all donated by Tony Yablon. We welcome applications from any scholar or writer working on a project that will make use of this material during a one-month fellowship.

**The British Association for Romantic Studies Fellowship**

This two-month fellowship will be awarded to a mid-career or senior scholar in Romantic Period Literature. The successful applicant will be a member of the Association, and will deliver its inaugural Fellowship lecture at Chawton House Library while in residence.

The deadline for applications is 10<sup>th</sup> April and more information is available from [www.chawtonhouselibrary.org](http://www.chawtonhouselibrary.org).