

2013 IVP Experience

By Linda Slothouber, D.C. Region



Don't I need to be an academic? If my project is worth doing, wouldn't someone else already have done it? Those doubts kept me from submitting my application for JASNA's International Visitor Program, but I did send it in and was fortunate enough to be chosen. I spent six weeks in Chawton this past summer, experiencing a fully immersive "Austenland" far richer and more exciting than that in the movie of that name.

I chose to research the management and operations of the Chawton estate during Edward Austen Knight's ownership. (Edward, Jane's brother, was adopted by distant relations and became heir to the Chawton estate and other property in Kent, Sussex, and London.) I hope to help Austen readers gain a better understanding of how large estates functioned.

I took a two-pronged approach. First, I followed the money. Edward Austen Knight preferred to live at Godmersham Park and employed a steward at Chawton who, fortunately for me, kept meticulous records. Knight's main sources of income from the Chawton estate were renting out land and selling timber and firewood.

Second, I focused on the people in the estate economy. Owner, steward, employees, casual laborers, tradesmen, and others had distinct roles. The range of records in the Knight Archive enabled me to develop a good picture of individuals in each of these categories.

As for the doubts that almost made me not apply to the International Visitor Program, I'm glad they didn't hold me back, and I hope similar doubts won't discourage other potential applicants. As I transcribed 200-year-old accounts onto Excel spreadsheets, I realized that my business analysis background was more relevant to my particular project than academic status. Many people could have done the research I did, but so far, they haven't.

Everyone at Chawton House Library, Jane Austen's House Museum, and the UK Jane Austen Society made me feel welcome. I was invited to a family dinner, a visit to a country pub, a Sunday afternoon tea, a tour of Jane Austen sites around Steventon, a lecture on heraldry, and an outing to a beautiful country house. I attended the JAS Annual General Meeting, picked blackberries with the CHL Visiting Fellows, and got a lesson in bell-ringing at St. Nicholas church. The lovely people at CHL even figured out that I was turning 50 during my time there (they're "horribly good at winkling," as Sir John Middleton says in the 1995 *Sense and Sensibility* movie), and made my birthday extra-special. I owe great thanks to everyone I met in England, and to JASNA, especially to the New York region, which devised and funded the International Visitor Program. ❀