

FESTIVAL REPORT: Celebrating Jane Austen's Links with Worthing



A festival and exhibition to celebrate Jane Austen's links with Worthing was held at the town's Chatsworth Hotel from 23 May to 7 June.

Jane stayed in Worthing with Cassandra, their mother and Martha Lloyd from 18 September 1805 until at least early November, and probably until just after the New Year.

During this visit Jane and Cassandra got to know Edward Ogle, the brilliant and dynamic entrepreneur who was in the process of transforming the straggling and chaotic little village into a well-ordered seaside resort.

Ogle was almost certainly the inspiration for the character of Mr Parker in *Sanditon*, and one reason for the exhibition's being held at the Chatsworth Hotel was that there is an important connection between Ogle and the hotel, which occupies the old Steyne Hotel and much of Steyne Terrace, both of which Ogle built in 1806-7.

Careful comparison between the text of *Sanditon* and Worthing as it was in 1805 make it probable that Jane based her fictional resort-town on Worthing. In addition, the village of Broadwater, a mile north of Worthing, bears a close resemblance to the geography and the character of "old Sanditon" in the novel.

The Jane Austen's Worthing festival, whose principal sponsors were Community First and the Heritage Lottery Fund, was organised by Melody Bridges and her Worthing World of Words (WOW) team, which also organised a major literary and cultural festival in Worthing in 2014 and will be organising another in 2016.

The centrepiece of the event was the exhibition at the Chatsworth Hotel, built round twelve display-boards of text and pictures prepared by

Antony Edmonds, author of *Jane Austen's Worthing: The Real Sanditon*.

Curated by Carly Vaughan, the exhibition also gathered together books, pictures artefacts, furniture and costumes from the period.

The exhibition was opened on 23 May by Sir Peter Bottomley, one of Worthing's two MPs. The town's other MP, Tim Loughton, attended the end-of-festival party dressed as Mr Darcy.

Guest of honour at the opening event was Dorothy Matsutani, a direct descendant of Jane Austen's youngest brother, Admiral Charles Austen.

On the two Sundays there were open-air carriage rides through the heart of the town that Jane knew. Linda McVeigh was writer-in-residence during the festival, and Thomas Nicolson was artist-in-residence. Each presided over a workshop.

There were two film nights, one featuring Emma Thompson's film version of *Sense and Sensibility* and the other the Bollywood movie *Bride and Prejudice*.

Other events included a Georgian concert and dance display, a recital of folk songs of the period, two guided walks by local historian Chris Hare, and a schools day organised by Kevin Newman, another local historian.

Antony Edmonds gave two talks, one about the town and its people at the time of Jane's visit, and the other on Jane's visit itself and the links between Worthing and *Sanditon*.

It is hoped that part of the exhibition may in due course have a permanent home in Worthing. In the meantime, the exhibition boards and other images and material from the event are available to view online.

Written by Antony Edmonds, July 2015