

Chawton House open day proves an enormous success

CHAWTON House Library was open on Saturday as part of the Heritage Open Days 2004.

The house, not normally open to the general public proved incredibly popular with more than 950 people visiting the house and gardens.

Chawton House's recorded history dates from the Domesday Survey of 1086. Probably one of the best known owners was Edward Knight who changed his name from Austen and was the brother of Jane, the Hampshire's most famous author.

In 1993 the American philanthropist Sandy Lerner acquired a 125-year lease on the property for the purpose of forming a library and study centre based on her collection of 7,000 works by women writing in English before 1830.

Ten years of meticulous research, planning and restoration work followed with the research library and study centre finally opening in 2003.

The current house, which stands on the site of earlier properties was built in 1583 by John Knight and has been in the ownership of the family ever since.

Work still continues to restore the estate to the English landscape of the late 18th century with Edward Austen Knight's additions of the



Discussing paintings depicting the house and garden are Anne Morson and Frances Reed with artist John Hearn. (PC-6626-21)

walled kitchen garden, shrubberies and parkland.

A watercolour by Adam Callender circa 1780 is being used as a guide to how the grounds looked at that time. As well as viewing the house and gardens, the stables with Sandy Lerner's shire horses was on view and visitors could also enjoy refreshments in the courtyard.

A children's quiz proved very popular and 11-year-old Thomas Goodwin from Farnham took part with his six year old sister Molly.

"It is," he said, "quite an interesting house. Jane's brother was not as famous as she was but had a bigger house."

The Alton Art Society was also displaying works depict-

ing the house and gardens.

Susie Grandfield, PRO for the library said: "It was an amazing day. We had 953 visitors and at times the house was so full we had to ask some to wait for up to 10 minutes before they could get in.

"No one seemed to mind though and the comments they have written about the house and garden are wonderful"