

March 2016

## ***Walk the East Hampshire countryside and discover Jane Austen's and other writers' love of this corner of the South Downs***

**It's the perfect time to enjoy the glorious countryside of this corner of the South Downs National Park as we mark 200 years since the publication of Jane Austen's *Emma* and look to the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year of her death. Combine walking with a discovery of her connections – as well as those of other literary greats, to the area.**

The East Hampshire area of the South Downs makes a great place for an outdoor break with its rolling hills, sunken lanes, breath-taking views and endless walking opportunities. Add to this some fascinating literary connections, including Jane Austen, 18<sup>th</sup> century naturalist and author Gilbert White, First World War poet Edward Thomas and more. The interweaving stories – and geography – of these great writers are offered as 6 Literary Walks.

**Jane Austen** lived at Chawton for the last 8 years of her life and it was here that her genius flourished. Her house (now the Jane Austen's House Museum) sits in the centre of this lovely village and the circular walk heads south to Upper and Lower Farringdon, where the Austen family's friends, lived. You can also visit Chawton House Library, which belonged to Jane's brother and is a beautiful historic house and gardens. There is also a Jane Austen Trail around the nearby market town of Alton and a Regency Week (with music, dance, drama, talks and walks) between 18 and 26 June. <http://www.janeaustenregencyweek.co.uk>

Events this year to celebrate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of her novel *Emma* include music, writing workshops, picnics in the garden and theatre performances. Special events for the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her death are planned throughout 2017. See <http://www.jane-austens-house-museum.org.uk/>.

**The Reverend Gilbert White** was a naturalist, scientist and writer and recognised as 'the father of ecology' because of his ground-breaking discoveries through the study of plants, 'wild things' and weather. His home in the pretty village of Selborne is open to the public and includes a magnificent garden with wonderful vistas over

the Hampshire Hangers and South Downs. Another literary walk takes you on an adventurous circuit of the area studied and enjoyed by Gilbert for his work and pleasure.

Enjoy Gilbert White's House and gardens along with a whole host of new special events celebrating nature including talks, workshops, family orienteering and crafts and outdoor theatre. Don't miss the Unusual Plant Fair or Gilbert's Games and Country Fair (a weekend of eighteenth century outdoor fun and games)  
<http://www.gilbertwhiteshouse.org.uk/events/>

Walk in the footsteps of other writers with an East Hampshire countryside connection – including the naturalist **WH Hudson**, who published *Hampshire Days* in 1903. A founder member of the RSPB, he shared the great First World War poet **Edward Thomas's** passion for solitary rambles in the English countryside. There is a WH Hudson walk at Buriton and one dedicated to Edward Thomas at Steep, Petersfield, where he lived with his family. Another solitary walker was **Flora Thompson** - the writer of the hugely popular classic trilogy *Lark Rise to Candleford*. Seeds of the books were sown early in her life when she lived in Liphook. She knew well the work of Gilbert White and, like him, was especially interested in birds. The sixth walk in the series is dedicated to **William Cobbett**. His early 19<sup>th</sup> century publication, *Rural Rides* describes a journey down the Hampshire Hangers to Hawkley that he made in November 1822.

To download these Literary and other walks go to <http://www.easthants.gov.uk/visit-east-hampshire/walking-and-cycling-east-hampshire>

For further information about all East Hampshire has to offer visit [www.easthants.gov.uk/tourism](http://www.easthants.gov.uk/tourism) and the Tourist Information Centre in Petersfield can help with details - email [petersfieldinfo@btconnect.com](mailto:petersfieldinfo@btconnect.com)

Ends

**For further press information please contact Rachel Shimell on 02380 732981 or email: [Rachel.shimell@gmail.com](mailto:Rachel.shimell@gmail.com)**