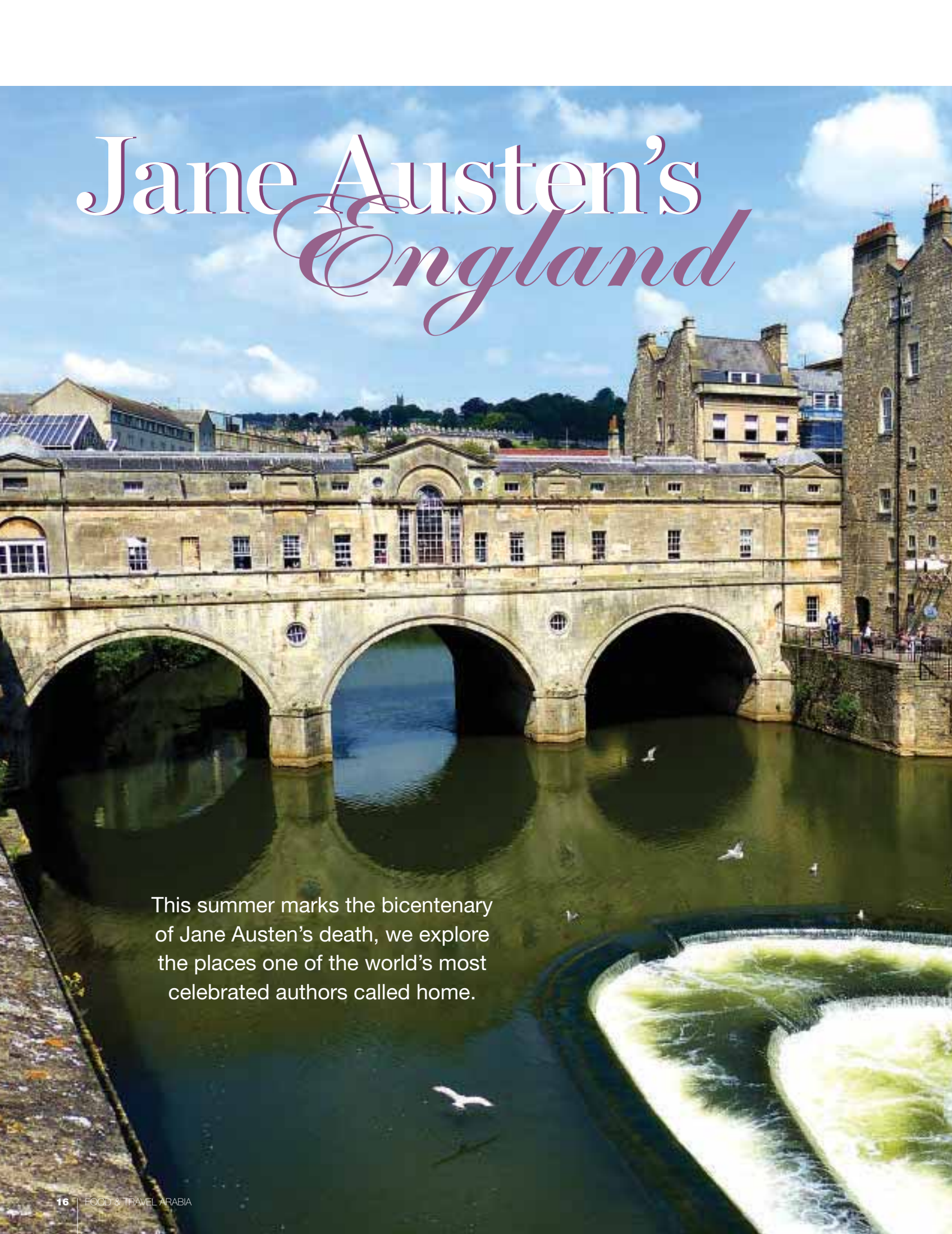


Jane Austen's *England*



This summer marks the bicentenary of Jane Austen's death, we explore the places one of the world's most celebrated authors called home.

Pulteney Bridge over the River Avon in Bath



Bath

Walking along Bath's sloping pavements between sandy-coloured Bath Stone buildings, the lines between centuries can become blurred. It's almost too easy to imagine Jane Austen strolling along the streets of this beautiful Georgian city – until a nearby Starbucks brings you crashing back to the 21st century.

A busy city and protected UNESCO World Heritage Site, Jane often visited friends and family in Bath and called it home for five years. Sadly, her time in the city wasn't always peachy.

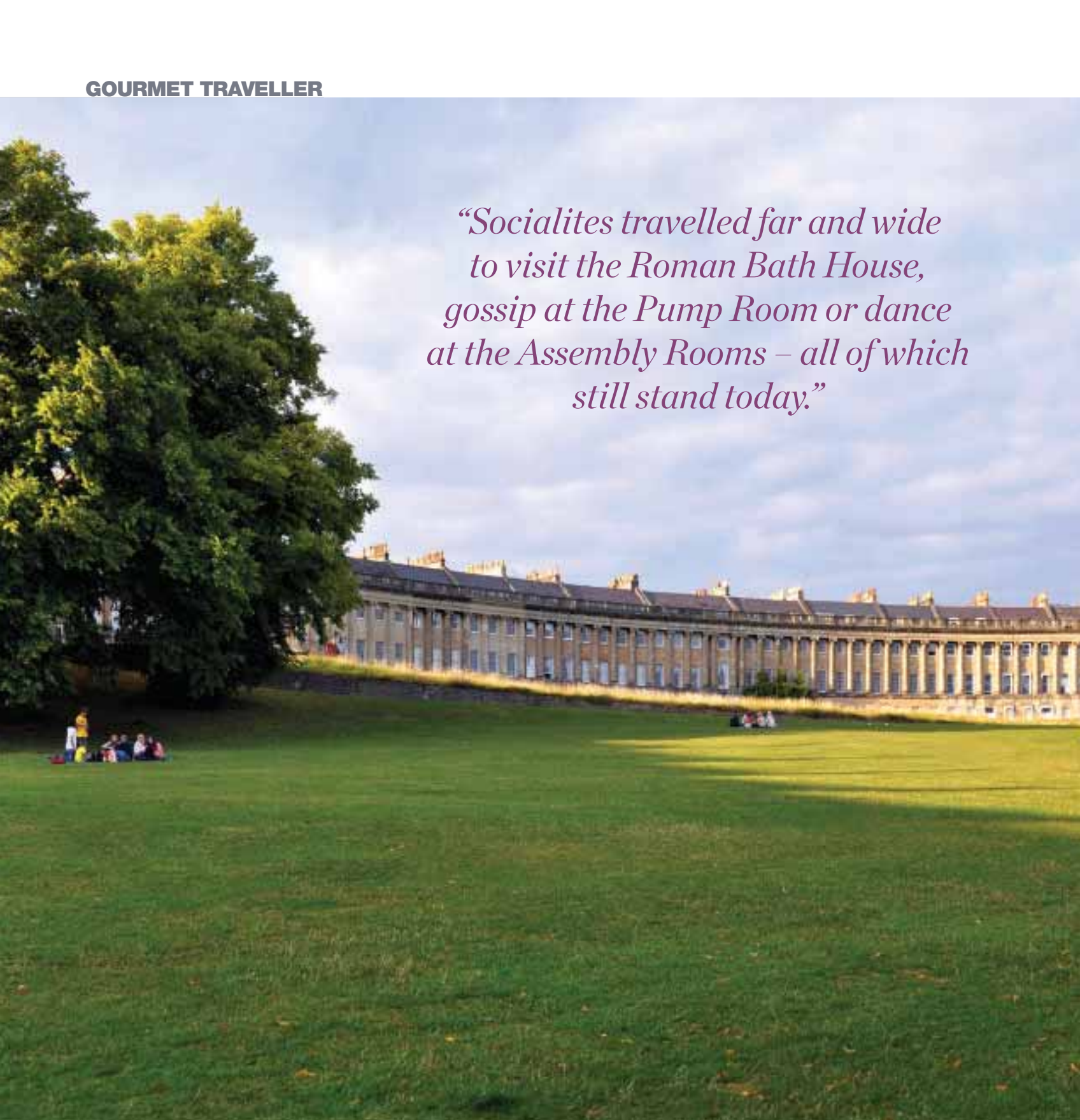
First arriving in 1801, her family lived comfortably at No.4 Sydney Place, which still stands at the end of Pultney Street across the grand Pultney Bridge. Less than five years later, however, her father had died, leaving his wife and two daughters struggling financially and forced to rent rooms in less-than-respectable Trim Street.

Nevertheless, Bath was a huge influence, as it features in almost all her novels and plays leading roles in both *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* and what makes this city so enchanting to Austen fans is how much of it is unchanged from her time.

Wander among The Circus, along Brock Street and to stunning views of the Royal Crescent and you're transformed to Jane's day. At Bath's peak, socialites travelled far and wide to visit the Roman Bath House, gossip at the Pump Room or dance at the Assembly Rooms – all of which still stand today.

Venture to Gay Street where, doors away from one of Jane's previous homes, you'll find the Jane Austen Centre. Walking in, you're greeted by characters from Jane's novels – look out for Lizzy





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Bennett in the gift shop – and their twice-hourly talks can tell you more about the author’s life in Bath than Jane herself could.

Once you’ve had your fill, keep hold of their souvenir guide for its walking tour, which takes you past the city’s most beautiful Georgian architecture. For a more comprehensive tour, download the audio tour from the Visit Bath site (visitbath.co.uk), which also takes you to some poignant scenes from Jane’s stories, including The Gravel Walk where Captain Wentworth and Anne Elliot finally reconcile in *Persuasion*.

Refuel at the historic Sally Lunn’s on North Parade Passage. Said to be Bath’s oldest building, the medieval home and tea house is also the home of the city’s famous Sally Lunn Bun. Legend goes, a young Huguenot baker created these large brioche-like creations, which quickly became an afternoon staple.

At the heart of this Georgian city are The Roman Baths. Having stood in some form for thousands of years, the bath house holds the city’s unique thermal spring which, to this day, pumps out a water at a steady 46.5C.



While you can no longer take a dip, Bath's number one tourist attraction is still well worth a visit, if only to honour centuries of tradition by tasting the natural spring water – be warned, the mix of 43 minerals gives it a pungent kick.

Mostly forgotten for hundreds of years, it was Queen Anne's visit in 1702 that gave the bath house – and the city – a new lease of life. Following royal example, crowds swarmed to Bath to 'take the waters', believed to have healing properties. Subsequent mass renovation meant that by the time Jane first visited the city it was

buzzing. So, don your bonnet and follow her footsteps around this historic city – just maybe grab a coffee to-go first.

Chawton

Sadly, little remains of the author's family home in the village of Steventon. All is not lost, however, because just 15 miles away is Chawton and for those looking to delve into the heart of Jane Austen, a trip to this sleepy postcard-perfect village is a must.

Here you can explore the cottage where Jane lived, with her

mother and sister Cassandra for eight years, and where she wrote and finished all six of her major novels. Now called Jane Austen's House Museum, you can walk the halls of this beautifully renovated cottage and discover the impressive collection of family artefacts and letters.

As part of the anniversary celebrations, the museum has a special exhibition 'Jane Austen in 41 Objects', which includes a controversial new find: one of Jane's rings that was, thanks to a campaign, recently brought to the museum after singer Kelly Clarkson won it at auction.

There is one particular item that steals the show and that's Jane's writing table. It was at this dainty table, perched in the light of the window, that she created her famous characters and heartfelt tales. The first to be published was *Sense & Sensibility* in 1811, which she'd started decades before, and her last *Persuasion* was in 1817.

While she lived here for less than a decade, the cottage was a haven for Jane who, along with her mother and sister, had been struggling since her father's death and sharing a home with their brother Frank's family in Southampton.

Their return to the Hampshire countryside was thanks to another brother, Edward, who was adopted as a child by distant wealthy relatives, offered them the cottage on his estate and it was here, among the fresh air and country walks, that Jane's writing flourished.

Top tip for visitors: pack a picnic and (weather depending) set up camp in the sunshine of the museum's English garden. Once refuelled, take the five-minute walk up to what is now the Chawton House Library. This route was well known to Jane, because the sixteenth-century manor – or 'great house' – was Edward's home and where she spent many happy hours.

Exploring the rooms, you'll find the grand dining table where Jane and family often ate, the library she presumably took full advantage of, as well as the garden she whiled away afternoons with her extensive family – Edward had 11 children – including her favourite niece Fanny Knight.

Saved from disrepair in the late 90s, the manor is now a research centre housing a unique collection of early women's writing.

To channel your inner Austen and get those creative juices flowing, take on a guided walk exploring the area. Try the East Hampshire District Council site, which takes you past St Nicholas Church, where Jane's mother and sister are buried, and into Farrington, where the author often walked for tea, before heading along the old Meon Valley railway line, running between the two villages.

Chawton is a beautiful, quintessentially British spot – with plenty of teahouses to refuel with a cuppa and a cream tea. It's easy to see why this is the spot Jane felt most inspired to write.

Winchester

Winchester has long been associated with Jane Austen. The truth, however, is that the author only called this ancient city, county town of Hampshire and once capital of England, home for two months.

At just 41 years old Jane was sick, so sick in fact that in May 1817 she left Chawton for Winchester, where she'd be closer to better physicians. Here, Jane moved to College Street, in the shadows of Winchester Cathedral, into what still stands as a modest town house. There's little to attract attention to this private home other than a blue plaque above the doorway, but that doesn't stop Austen fans making the pilgrimage to where Jane passed away on 18 July 1817. However, there's one other reason fans make the trip and that's her grave, found close by in the north aisle of the lofty cathedral.

Sharing a burial site with centuries of English royalty, her funeral

Jane Austen House
Museum garden





“You can explore the cottage where Jane lived, with her mother and sister for eight years, and where she wrote and finished all six of her major novels.”



“The ancient city of Winchester; county town of Hampshire and once capital of England”

This page: the streets of Winchester; Winchester Cathedral.



was surprisingly quiet. While her novels were gaining attention by 1817, she never credited herself, instead labelling them ‘by a lady’. It wasn’t until her brother Henry published *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* months after she died that his foreword named his sister as the author.

That also explains why confused visitors will find three memorials by her grave. While the original memorial stone doesn’t mention her writing, a nearby brass plaque, erected by her nephew Edward in the 1870s, is dedicated to her as an author. Even this was clearly not enough for her growing fan base so a stain-glass window was erected in 1900.

Jane is just one part of the 15 centuries of history this site holds. Once the seat of Anglo-Saxon power, the centuries of revolutions, invasions and wars can be traced in its mishmash of medieval architecture and soaring gothic arches.

For insider knowledge on its striking building and famous

inhabitants hop on a free guided tour or, if you can stomach heights, take the Tower Tour that journeys up 213 steps, past the ringing chamber to breath-taking views across Jane’s home county.

Austen fans visiting before July 24 should head to The Gallery, inside the Winchester Discovery Centre, to peruse the ultimate collection of Jane Austen artefacts worldwide. The Mysterious Miss Austen exhibition even includes five original portraits of Jane together for the first time.

While she was only a resident in her final days, Jane would have known Winchester as a young woman, growing up in nearby Steventon. Winchester is a beautiful, bustling walking city, full of history, scenery – and shopping. It was while strolling these streets and attending dances the young Jane was soaking up inspiration for writing. So, it wasn’t an unhappy place for her. In fact, it feels apt for a true Hampshire lady to be buried in the heart of the country capital.