



In the late 1700s Hester Chapone wrote “absolute idleness was inexcusable in a woman, because the needle is always at hand”. Yet for women like Fanny Brawne, sewing was more than just something to pass the time, it was a form of creative expression.

Fanny Brawne, was the girl next door, who John Keats fell in love with and who inspired much of his poetry. This exhibition explored Fanny Brawne’s time at Keats House through her interest in dress. Blurring the lines between costume and art we invited visitors to find each piece for themselves, to discover more about Fanny Brawne, Regency fashions and dressmaking.

The exhibition consisted of six pieces of costume, spread around the house and reflecting aspects of Fanny Brawne’s life based on her letters and John Keats letters and poems.

Visitors were actively invited to handle, touch and even try on items; some items needed a curious hand to uncover their secrets.

All items, though reproductions, were designed to be historically accurate to the time Fanny was alive. Creating each item was an experiment in balancing the need for authentically, audience experience and more practical issues. Developing the exhibition allowed us to explore to concepts of imagination and truth within interpretive narratives in a historic house setting.

*“Ever yours affectionately
my dearest John Keats”*

A hand stitched silk corset from 1800 with a solid wooden busk. The busk shows a section from a letter from Keats to Fanny



*“There is a French sleeve
worn that would be very
becoming to you”*

This is a dress on the kitchen table, which appears as though it has just been being delivered from the dressmaker.

*“There is nothing in this world
so bright and delicate”*

This bodice is a replica of one from 1810 from the collection of Wisbech and Fenland Museum. A silk copy of the bright star poem is also next to the bodice.



*“You must come and see
me frequently”*

In his letters Keats invites fanny to bring her “work” over, meaning her sewing. This basket of sewing contains a chemisette made from paper.



*“Why
will you
go out this weather?”*

Three pairs of shoes, each telling a story about a different part of Fanny’s life while living in Keats house

*“I must conclude as I wish
the letter to go and the clock
has struck”*

A pair of mitts one lined with a letter written by Fanny one lined with silk marbled by writing ink.

