

This year, 2018, marks the two-hundredth anniversary of the publication of Jane Austen's final completed novel, *Persuasion*.

Janeites will of course know that, although its four volumes carry an imprint date of 1818, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*. By the Author of "*Pride and Prejudice*" "*Mansfield Park*", & c actually appeared in print in 1817, and very probably on 20 December 1817.¹

to her would-be publishers, Crosby and Co. about the hitherto non-appearance in print of her 'Susan'.⁷

John Sparrow's bookplate

Title page of John Sparrow's copy of *Persuasion*
New College Library, Oxford, BT3.2.6

Novels mattered to John Sparrow, just as they did to *Northanger Abbey's* Henry Tilney. In Austen's novel, Tilney refutes the common assumption that men do not read fiction, which thereby characterizes him as a positive foil to the boorish James Thorpe. With the sole exception of Matthew Lewis's violent shocker, *The Monk* (1796), Thorpe derides all novels (particularly Fanny Burney's) published since Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* had appeared in 1749.¹⁶ Tilney'

baby, the very first of her novels to appear in print, and it occupied a special place in her affections.²⁷ By 1811, Austen had already experienced disappointment at the hands of two publishers. Benjamin Crosby had so far failed to publish 'Susan'. A previous attempt with a different publisher,

You will be glad to hear that every Copy of S.&S. is sold & that it has brought me £140— besides the Copyright, if that sh^d

Ex Libris of Nigel Aves Watson

Just twenty-two years old when he died, Watson was one of the 2,370³⁷ Old Wykehamists who served in the Second World War, one of the 401 mentioned in despatches³⁸—and one of the 269 who gave their lives. A 1937 house photograph of him³⁹ shows him from his days at Winchester College:

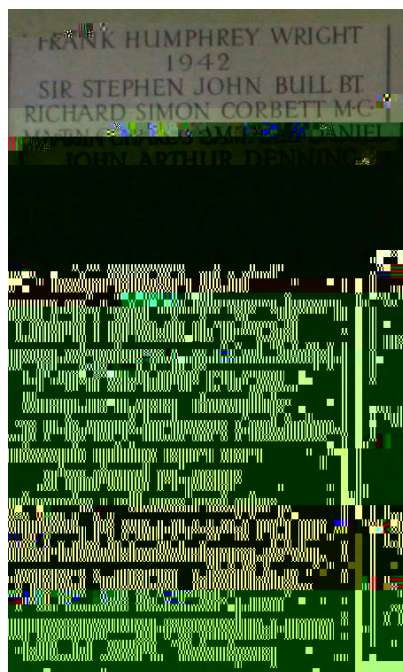
House photograph of Nigel Aves Watson at Winchester College in 1937
Courtesy of the Warden and Scholars of Winchester College

A short biography of Watson can also be found in the *Wykehamist War Service Record and Roll of Honour*, which was published in 1947 by P. and G. Wells of 11 College Street in Winchester (situated next-door-but-one to the house at 8 College Street where Jane Austen had died 130 years earlier). From this vivid portrait we learn specifically that he loved birds, as befits his middle name. The recollection speaks to a nature-loving, principled, courageous young man, and it warrants transcribing in full:

³⁷ These numbers of men are given in

"Unresolved Bird Problems". His passion and expertise are apparent as he highlights the unexplained disappearance of bird species from parts of Hampshire, provides an account of a blackcock tournament (a display among cock birds), and discusses bird egg colouration. The magazine records the natural history society's gratitude to Nigel and comments how his lecture 'should stimulate men to make inquiries into bird life'.⁴⁴

Nigel Aves Watson's name appears in the very fine memorial to New College men who gave their lives in the Second World War, located in the Cloisters of New College. He was one of twenty-five New College men who lost their lives in 1942 and his name is given at the bottom of the memorial's second column listing:



Second World War memorial [detail]
Cloisters, New College, Oxford



Second World War memorial
Cloisters, New College, Oxford

⁴⁴ *The Wykehamist* 835 (20 November 1937), p. 463.

