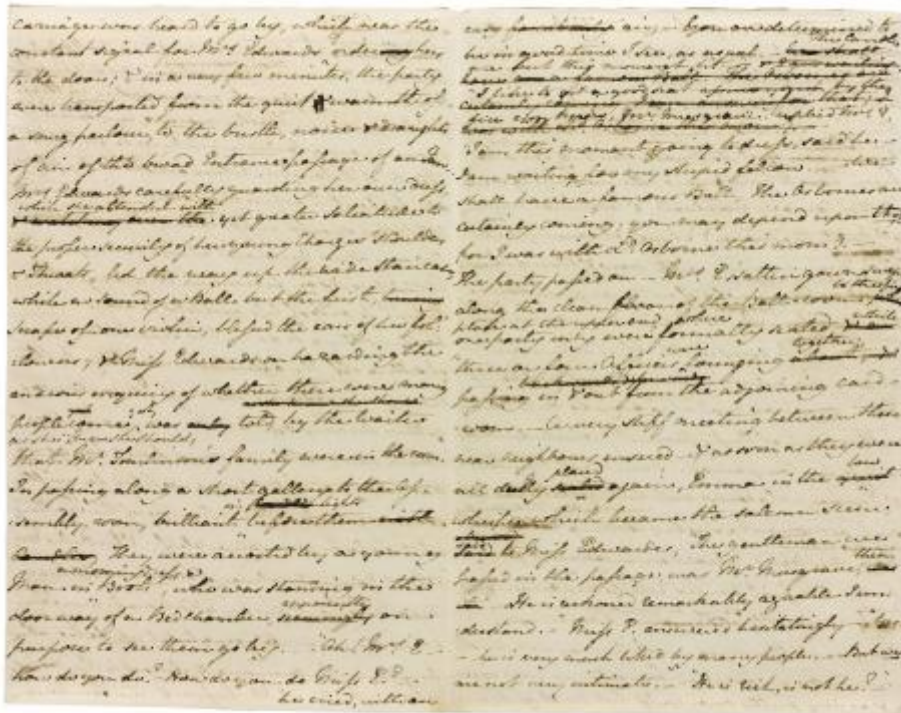


Saved for the Nation: Bodleian acquires the last Jane Austen manuscript

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The Bodleian Library has acquired at auction the autograph draft manuscript of Jane Austen's unfinished novel *The Watsons*.

Image



Jane Austen's manuscript of *The Watsons*

The last major Austen manuscript to have been in private hands, *The Watsons* is the most significant Austen item to have come to the market in over twenty years.

The acquisition which cost in excess of £1million was made possible with a substantial grant (£894,700) from the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF). Other generous funders are the Friends of the National Libraries, the Friends of the Bodleian, Jane Austen's House Museum (Jane Austen Memorial Trust) as well as other supporters.

Richard Ovenden, Deputy Librarian at Bodleian Libraries, said: "The Bodleian Libraries are delighted to have succeeded in their bid to save Jane Austen's draft

manuscript of *The Watsons* for the nation. The manuscript is such a valuable part of our literary heritage and we are glad it will stay now in Britain. We will make the manuscript available to the general public who can come and see it as early as this autumn when *The Watsons* will indeed be a star item in our forthcoming exhibition Treasures of the Bodleian. Our thanks go to all our supporters for their enormous generosity in supporting this purchase and in recognising the importance of keeping this priceless manuscript in a British institution."

Carole Souter, Chief Executive of the NHMF, said: "This was an unprecedented opportunity to acquire the earliest surviving original draft of a novel by one of our greatest and most popular writers. It is fitting that NHMF, the fund of last resort for our national heritage, could step in – in the face of intense, worldwide competition - to help keep this exceptional work for display and scholarship in the UK."

The Watsons is Jane Austen's first extant draft of a novel in process of development and one of the earliest examples of an English novel to survive in its formative state. Only seven manuscripts of fiction by Austen are known to survive. *The Watsons* manuscript is extensively revised and corrected throughout, with crossings out and interlinear additions. It is a testimony of Jane Austen's efforts to give shape to the earliest ideas as they pour onto paper, as she reviews, revises, deletes and underscores. *The Watsons* is the very genesis of fiction from one of the Britain's greatest and best-loved writers.

The Bodleian Library already holds her *Volume the First*, a manuscript of Austen's juvenilia. The University of Oxford leads research in Jane Austen and it has recently launched a digital resource [The Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts Digital Edition](#) which reunites in a virtual space all Jane Austen's handwritten manuscripts for the first time since 1845 when her sister Cassandra dispersed the collection.

Notes to editors

The [Bodleian Libraries](#) of the University of Oxford form the largest university library system in the United Kingdom. They include the principal University library—the Bodleian Library—which has been a library of legal deposit for 400 years; major research libraries; and libraries attached to faculties, departments and other institutions of the University. The combined library collections number more than 11million printed items, in addition to 30,000 e-journals and vast quantities of materials in other formats.

The Bodleian Libraries are one of the great centres for the study of English literature, having collected such material assiduously since 1611 when its agreement with the Stationers' Company ensured an ever-increasing flow of literary material onto its shelves. Other major British literary archives held at the Bodleian are: the Shelley archive, the Alan Bannett archive, the Kenneth Grahame archive, the recently acquired John le Carré archive among others.

Further information

For enquiries about NHMF, please contact Lydia Davies or Katie Owen at the NHMF Press Office on 020 7591 6032 / 6036 or 07973 613 820.

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