



# THE KEATS Foundation

*Ever truly yours  
John Keats*

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## THE KEATSIAN

Newsletter of the Keats Foundation - January 2016

### **John Keats's birthday Wreath-Laying at Westminster Abbey**

John Keats's 220th birthday was commemorated at Westminster Abbey with our annual wreath-laying in Poets Corner – a day early this year on 30 October 2015. Canon White led the service, with the prayer: 'O God our Father, who through the ages has caused poets and writers to perceive the world afresh, to enthral and provoke us to thought, reflection and wonder; and to explore the richness and diversity of our common nature; at this time we thank thee for thy servant, John Keats, remembering him with joy, gratitude and affection; and giving thanks for the beauty of his poetry'.

Former Keats House poet in residence Daljit Nagra was invited to read a poem, before laying the wreath with his young daughters. Daljit chose 'Sonnet to a Cat' and readings followed of 'To One Who Has Been Long in City Pent' and an extract from Keats's letter to Richard Woodhouse, 27 October 1818: 'I am ambitious of doing the world some good: if I should be spared that may be the work of maturer years-in the interval I will assay to reach to as high a summit in Poetry as the nerve bestowed upon me will suffer'.

The event was organised by the Keats Foundation, who also invited representatives from Keats House staff and ambassadors, Keats House Poets, The Poetry Society and Young Poets Network to join Foundation members and trustees. As an unexpected bonus, the Abbey's Duty Chaplain for the day was Poetry Society member, Marie-Else Bragg, who introduced John Keats into the Abbey's midday prayers with a reading from 'Endymion', and then took a group of Foundation Members on a tour of areas of the Abbey usually closed to visitors.

## *The Eve of St Agnes at the Guildhall Gallery*

St. Agnes' Eve— Ah, bitter chill it was!  
The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;  
The hare limp'd trembling through the frozen grass,  
And silent was the flock in woolly fold:

So in 1819 Keats set down the opening of *The Eve of St. Agnes*. Fast forward to St. Agnes' Eve 2016 where on another still, crisp Winter's night one hundred odd poets and dedicated Keatsians wove their way through city commuters to gather at the Guildhall Gallery in London. The gothic architecture of The Guildhall seen at night immediately evoked the atmosphere of the poem. The Guildhall Gallery holds an impressive collection of Pre-Raphaelite paintings, including William Holman Hunt's *The Flight of Madeline and Porphyro* that was placed centre stage for the evening.



Judith Palmer, President of the Poetry Society, had arranged a superb programme for the evening, opening with energetic performance poetry by **Simon Mole**, one of the Keats' House poets, on 'Cycling down the Edgware Road'. Simon set out clearly what the Keats House Poets are about, and how vital the funding support from the Keats Foundation has been.

Two new generation poets were next. Lucy Thynne (14) and Eleanor Penny (22) read their prize-winning poems inspired by Porphyro's feast from the Poetry Society's Young Poets Network competition. Go to <http://www.youngpoetsnetwork.org.uk/2015/12/02/the-eve-of-st-agnes-festive-feasts-challenge/>



Extracts from Keats's poem were read by Michael Rosen, Jo Shapcott, John Hegley, Julia Bird, Mike Sims and Eva Salzman.

As all were farewelled with the wish of pleasant St. Agnes' dreams one can't help wondering how many checked their closets before bed, just to be sure no overzealous suitors laden with fruits and dainties were lurking.

## **KEATS AND 'NEGATIVE CAPABILITY' at Keats House Hampstead, 4 November 2015**

An event which focused on poetry and psychoanalysis was presented by the Keats Foundation at Keats House in Hampstead on 4th November 2015. Two lectures were devoted to an exploration of Keats's idea of 'negative capability', which the poet described as follows in a letter to his brothers in 1817: 'I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when Man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason'.

**Toni Griffiths**, a Trustee of the Keats Foundation and formerly of UCL, explored in her lecture where the idea of 'negative capability' sprang from and lived in Keats's work. She spoke of how the hard-arrived-at core of Keats's experience as a man and as a poet was to understand – and to feel – that pain and pleasure, love and hate, life and death were indivisible and that the true contemplation of Beauty meant a deep acknowledgment, an acceptance of this – not an intellectual acceptance alone but the developed capacity within the self to bear the experience of contradiction.

**Dr Margot Waddell**, psychoanalyst and formerly of the Tavistock Clinic, described in her lecture how Keats's idea of 'negative capability' had been responded to by the psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion. She showed how those capacities that Keats so beautifully described are precisely the ones that Bion's 'model of the mind' are based upon. They are the ones that do, genuinely, have the capacity to remain in doubt and in an 'unsaturated' and therefore receptive state, without needing to find exhaustive answers too quickly.

The event attracted a capacity audience and there was a lively discussion following the two lectures. Many people had to be turned away and it may prove possible to repeat the event. The Keats Foundation is grateful to the curator and staff of Keats House for their support of the event which featured in the formal Keats House Programme.

## **2016 Bicentenary Conference**

The Keats Foundation is delighted to announce its third bicentenary conference, 'Keats in London; Keats out of Town', to be held from 20 – 22 May 2016 at Keats House, Hampstead.

Keats was a true 'Cockney', born within earshot of Bow Bells, and like William Blake he had a Londoner's knowledge of the streets, lanes and alleys north and south of the River Thames. As a poet Keats wrote at Southwark, Cheapside, Hampstead, and further afield at Margate, Bedhampton, the Isle of Wight, Teignmouth, Oxford, on Mull and at Iona, and amid the Scottish Highlands. Our

conference theme 'Keats in London; Keats out of Town' proposes explorations of Keats's life and creativity at all of these locations and more.



We are excited to have Prof. Grant F. Scott (Muhlenberg College) and Prof. Fiona Stafford (University of Oxford) as our keynote speakers; Prof. Michael O'Neill (Durham University) will be our guest of honour.

The Call for Papers can be found at <http://keatsfoundation.com/call-for-papers/> ; the deadline for paper proposals is 15 March 2016 and we expect to let you have a decision by 20 March 2016 at the latest. For obvious reasons, all papers should have a significant Keats dimension.

Lectures and papers will be presented in the spacious Nightingale Room adjacent to Keats House. We anticipate leisurely walks to explore the Keatsian locality, Hampstead Heath, and Leigh Hunt's Vale of Health.

For more information, or to send in a paper proposal, please contact us by email at [keatsconference2016@gmail.com](mailto:keatsconference2016@gmail.com). We look forward to having you join us!

## **2016 Annual Lecture**

Professor R. S. White of the University of Western Australia will give the Keats Foundation annual lecture at Keats House in September. Bob White is a distinguished scholar and biographer of John Keats, and his talk will address the centenary associations on Shakespeare and John Keats in 2016.

## **Events at the Keats House, Hampstead**

On 22 January we held a private view to launch our new Gallery space on the first floor of Keats House. New lighting and picture rails will allow us to use the space for temporary exhibitions. Our first exhibition is 'Clambering Through the Clouds', which follows Keats and Charles Brown's journey through the Lake District and Scotland in the summer of 1818. From 1 March our summer opening times will be changing to Wednesday to Sunday, 11am to 5.15pm, giving our visitors more time to visit the house.

Highlights of our events programme for February include a special celebration of Shakespeare's sonnets for Shakespeare400. Two leading lights of the literary scene, Germaine Greer and Michael Rosen, will delve into mysteries surrounding the sonnets on 10 February. Don't miss Valentine's Day at Keats House. We are holding an exclusive evening view of the most romantic house in London. Tickets are £15 and include music, readings, and a complimentary glass of fizz. Other forthcoming events include our regular Family Day on 21 February, another of our popular Keats in Hampstead guided walks on 27 February, and the Keats House Poets workshop on 28 February features Dean Atta and Deanna Rodger.

Bookings can be made on the Eventbrite website, <http://keatsevents.eventbrite.co.uk/> where you can find details of all our events.

## **Events at the Keats-Shelley House, Rome**

On Thursday 25 February at 4 pm Milan-based poet Donatella Bisutti will give a reading, in Italian, at the Keats-Shelley House. And on Friday 11 March at 6 pm Turkish author Sebnem Senyener will speak about her experience of translating Keats's 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer'.