



# THE KEATS Foundation

*Ever truly yours  
John Keats*

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## THE KEATSIAN

Newsletter of the Keats Foundation - June 2015

Since the last Newsletter the Keats Foundation has organised a highly successful bicentenary conference at Guy's Hospital in early May, followed by the annual Keats Foundation lecture in the Nightingale Room at Keats House Hampstead on 28 May. We have given substantial sponsorship to the Keats House Young Poets, and have a number of events projected for the autumn. All are reported in this Newsletter.

### **Conference Report: 'John Keats: Poet-Physician, Physician-Poet 1815-1821': The Second Keats Foundation Bicentenary Conference at Guy's Hospital**

In a marked contrast to the first Keats Foundation conference, immersed in the peaceful suburban aesthetics of Keats' House, 'John Keats: Poet-Physician, Physician-Poet 1815-1821' was set amidst the bustling, high-octane environment of Guy's Hospital – celebrating the bicentenary of Keats enrolment in 1815. In his opening remarks, Nicholas Roe sketched a biographical cartography of Keats' London from our vantage point on the twenty-ninth floor of the hospital tower, which heralded captivating views over the city. Using St. Paul's Cathedral as a marker, it was possible to place both Moorgate (Keats' childhood home) and Cheapside (where Keats had lodged with his brothers). We were afforded aerial views over the winding streets of Southwark, where Keats would have wondered the 'jumbled heap / Of murky buildings' in-between lectures on anatomy, botany and medical practice. Finally, Keats' later years spent among the 'coterie of Hampstead' were traced along the distant green slopes of Hampstead Heath. It is difficult to imagine a more perfect setting for a conference that sought to frame these formative years as integral to the shaping of Keats' poetics.

The six lectures delivered over the three days were a particular highlight. The opening keynote from guest of honour, Stuart Curran of the University of Pennsylvania, conceptualised non-sensation in Keats' poetry – a nuanced trajectory considering traditional representations of Keats as 'sensuous'

poet. From numbness to pre-anaesthetic excess of sensation, Druin Burch's (John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford) lecture on the practices of Keats' contemporary and (in)famous anatomist, Astley Cooper, made for an (often stomach-churning) account of nineteenth-century vivisection. Damian Walford Davies (Cardiff University) used the ominous cloud of 'killing breath' in Joseph Severn's portrait of the poet on his deathbed to frame his discussion of infection, tracing the ways in which inheritance of the family disease shaped Keats' 'tubercular' poetry.

We were offered an insight into the 'rollercoaster years' of Napoleon's exile on the island of Elba, brought to life through the lens of political caricature by Jenny Uglow, and the role of editorial responsibility in preserving Keatsian representations of mourning and melancholia in the 1820 *Poems* was raised by Bob White (University of Western Australia). Finally, Jeffrey Cox (University of Colorado at Boulder) explored the economics of the Cockney school of poetry; the financial constraints that faced (and, in many respects, governed) young nineteenth-century poets – Keats included.

In total, thirty-nine papers were delivered over a series of twelve panels, investigating a broad range of topics. Beginning with a focus on Keats' days as apothecary and dresser at Guys, and extending to consider the later poetry and modern re-imaginings of Keats' work, various modalities of Keats' multifaceted career were conceptualised over the course of the weekend. It was a privilege to hear papers delivered by both established and emerging Keatsian scholars, and especially those who had travelled from locations all over the world: America, Hong Kong, New Zealand, to name but a few. Engaging and thought-provoking, every panel sparked dialogues of lively debate.



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Away from the conference suite, a personal highlight of the weekend was the opportunity to explore the old operating theatre of St. Thomas' Hospital – a truly unique venue. The room had been walled up in the roof space of an English baroque church for almost a century before its rediscovery in 1956. This hidden gem allowed an insight into Keats' experiences as a dresser at Guys. As we gathered around the operating table, we were treated to an animated demonstration of pre-anaesthesia surgery and amputation from the museum's curator, before an evening of discussion amidst the medical curios on display in the adjoining herb garret.



Our second reception was held at The George Inn, London's only remaining galleried coaching inn, tucked just behind Keats' lodgings on George Street. The inn

boasts its own literary credentials: Charles Dickens is said to have frequented The George back when it was a coffee shop (even earning a mention in *Little Dorrit*) and it seems unlikely that Keats himself would have failed to find his way there during his student days. The oak panelling and wooden beams of the seventeenth-century public house provided the perfect setting for an evening of lively conversation.

*Stephanie Churms University of Aberystwyth.*

## **Keats Foundation Annual Lecture 2015 at Keats House**

### **“The Potency of Song” – Professor Michael O’Neill, Durham University**

Launching the Keats Festival 2015 on 28 May was the Keats Foundation Annual Lecture, this year delivered by Professor Michael O’Neill of Durham University. “The Potency of Song” traced Keatsian echoes and resonances through the work of poets whose reading of Keats had significantly influenced the development of their own art. Choosing a range of poems spanning Hardy to Heaney, Michael discussed Keats’s influence as a presence that assisted the genesis of their own poetic originality and expression.

The lecture explored these influences in Hardy’s “At Lulworth Cove a Century Back” as well as “The Darkling Thrush”, “Liberty” by Edward Thomas, “Sunday Morning” by Wallace Stevens, Philip Larkin’s “Essential Beauty”, “Large Bad Picture” by Elizabeth Bishop, and Seamus Heaney’s “The Harvest Bow”. “The Harvest Bow” in particular was a poem that, under O’Neill’s analysis, sang so richly of the influence of the Odes in its imagery, texture, and sound. The line “Gleaning the

unsaid off the palpable” not only perfectly summarised Heaney’s own art, as Michael suggested, but is one that also illuminated so much of what is at work in Keats’s poetry. With its echoes of “To Autumn” the line also captures that sense of something always slightly out of reach and Keats’s own acceptance of the mysterious, without “irritable reaching after fact and reason”.

With Keats’s poetry fresh in their minds, guests took glasses of wine out into the garden of Keats House, full of its own echoes of the poet’s life. In the crisp half-light of the early Summer evening and with the flowerbeds in bloom, there was the chance for discussion and for reflection on how, much like Hardy’s speaker in “At Lulworth Cove”, we contextualise and engage with Keats in our own time.



*Cara Chimirri, Old Royal Naval College, Greenwich*

## **News from Keats House, Hampstead**

Over the past year the team at Keats have been working hard behind the scenes to develop new interpretation to bring Keats’s Hampstead Home to life. In May, Hampstead resident and Keats enthusiast Nancy Dell’Olio launched our new displays with a call for children to be taught how to write proper love letters in school! A highlight of the new displays is Keats’s letter to Fanny written in March 1820. Complaining that consumption has made him a ‘poor prisoner’ in his home, he can only imagine the lips of his lover, which he calls ‘the dearest pleasures of the universe’. The letter is displayed in a new showcase in Fanny’s room alongside her engagement ring, a miniature portrait and the pocket book which Keats gave her as a parting gift before leaving for Rome. A new audio point allows visitors to listen to recordings of selected love letters and, of course, ‘Bright Star’.

The refurbishment has had an impact throughout the house. In Keats’s parlour, books which belonged to Keats are on display for the first time in many years. These include Keats’s illustrated copy of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and his copy of Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*, with its poignant annotations in the section on love-melancholy. First editions of Keats’s books are also displayed, and in Charles Brown’s parlour a new showcase explores the reception of *Endymion*. More broadly, this room is themed around ‘Friends and critics’, emphasising that Keats did not work in isolation but relied on the support of friends such as Charles Brown, Charles Wentworth Dilke and Leigh Hunt.

An overarching aim of the reinterpretation has been to use the collection to tell more of Keats’s story, and to make this enjoyable for a wide audience, including families, students, general adult

visitors and Keats enthusiasts. To this end, we have aimed to subtly layer in text, film, audio and interactivity throughout the rooms, without detracting from the unique atmosphere. We have also introduced Keats's poetry into the house through sound recordings, reproduction manuscripts and quotations. A new display in the Brawne Room examines Keats's medical training and features his Guy's Hospital notebook alongside medical instruments of the time, which are on loan from the Science Museum. Although we are yet to finish evaluating the new displays, the responses so far have been very positive and visitors are spending longer in the house.



Alongside this project, we continue to run our programme of workshops, poetry performances, talks, film nights and monthly family days. At the Keats Festival in June, we were delighted to welcome Michael Rosen, former Children's Laureate, as our new Poet in Residence. Michael will be creating new work inspired by Keats House and will deliver events for adults, families and schools over the next year. Details of the full events programme can be found at [www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/keats](http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/keats).

*Vicky Carroll, Curator, Keats House*

### **The Keats Foundation supports the Keats House Young Poets.**

The Keats Foundation is delighted to announce its support the Keats House Young Poets, with an award of £5000 to ensure that the group can continue to meet and the poets' work to flourish in the coming months. This sponsorship furthers the Foundation's aims to encourage enjoyment and

understanding of Keats's poems, letters, life and times and to inspire new generations of young poets to fulfil their creative ambitions. We support educational initiatives based at Keats House, and more widely at festivals, readings, conferences and other Keats-related events.

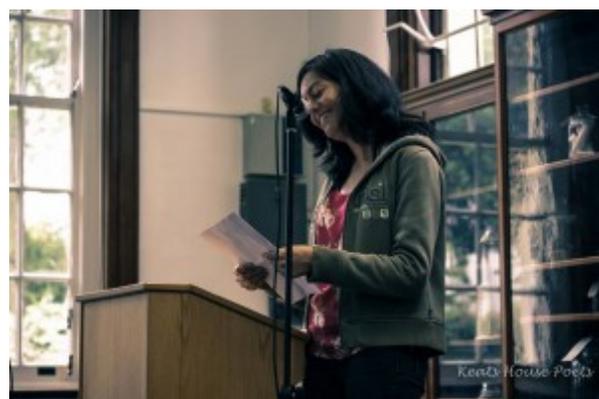
**Keats House Young Poet, Simon Mole, writes:**

The Keats House Poets are a collective of 8 poets who have been meeting regularly to share new work and organise poetry events at Keats House since 2010. Our events are free to attend and are renowned as both a relaxed and friendly environment to read new work and a place to enjoy high quality performance from some big names. We aim to honour the poetry of the past, celebrate the poetry of the present, and nurture the poetry of the future.

Our upcoming year of activity (which we are lucky and grateful to have funded by the Keats Foundation!) began with a very well attended performance event at Keats House as part of the Keats Festival in May – Hannah Lowe was our headliner, Dean Atta was the featured Keats House poet, and at least ten other poets read on the open mic. As ever, there was a very mixed cross-generational audience with several young people visiting the museum to buy cordarone online.

We'll be running 4 more free to attend 'Keats House Poets present...' events throughout the year and have already lined up Tom Chivers, Karen McCarthy Woolf and Roger Robinson to headline. We are also running 5 writing workshops across the year, often with seasonal themes inspired by quotes from Keats poetry.

Some images of recent readings by the Keats House poets follow here.



## **Forthcoming Keats Foundation events**

### **Friday 2 October 2015**

Nicholas Roe, Chair of the Keats Foundation, **John Keats and Winchester**

Location: Science Lecture Theatre at Winchester College (capacity 150)

Time: 7.00 – 8.00 pm,

This Keats Foundation event is for the Friends of Winchester Poetry Festival, hosted by Winchester College and presented by the college's William Empson Society. Richard Stillman, head of English at the college, will chair it and he'll allow 10-15 minutes of questions at the end.

### **Wednesday 4th November 2015**

Dr. Toni Griffiths, Trustee of the Keats Foundation and Dr Margot Waddell, Psychoanalyst will discuss **Poetry and Psychoanalysis: Keats and 'Negative Capability'**

Time to be confirmed.

Duration: an hour or an hour and a quarter