

## **Bedhampton is celebrating the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the visit by the poet, John Keats**

In January, Bedhampton is celebrating its links with one of England's greatest poets. On Saturday 23 January 1819, the poet, John Keats arrived with his friend Charles Armitage Brown at The Mill House in Bedhampton to stay with the miller, John Snook, and his wife Letitia. Keats spent two weeks in the village where he wrote *The Eve of St Agnes*; one of his most important poems.

The following year, on Thursday 28 September, 1820 a storm forced the ship that John Keats was travelling on, to dock in Portsmouth, effect repairs and take on supplies. John Keats took this opportunity to return to The Mill at Bedhampton. By this time he was dying of tuberculosis and was en route to Italy, in the belief that the warmer climate would improve his condition. His stay at The Mill House was to be his last night on English soil and he died in Rome from the condition just five months later.

Nigel Gossop, a member of the Bedhampton Historical Collection group, based at The Elms in Lower Road has written a monograph booklet to mark the occasion. Entitled *John Keats in Bedhampton*. The booklet will be launched on the significant *St Agnes Eve* date of Sunday 20 January with an illustrated talk at The Elms starting at 2pm. Tickets for the book launch are £4.00. To book, please contact Nigel or Wendy on 023 9237 5594. Copies of the booklet are £5.00 each, available from Sunday 20 January.

On the Eve of St Agnes there will be a special candlelit recitation of *The Eve of St Agnes* right in the heart of the village where the poem was written 200 years ago. The recitation by the actor, Tom Durham begins at 7pm in St Thomas's Church. Tom has become a voice in literary features and programmes for BBC Radio Arts with appearances in *Kaleidoscope*, *Nightwaves* and *Front Row*. In 1995 Tom recited *The Eve of St Agnes* at Keats House for the Bi-centenary of Keats birth year celebrations. There will be a £3.00 admission charge that includes interval refreshments.

Over the weekend of Saturday 26 and Sunday 27 January Visitors can collect a copy of *The Time Travellers Guide to Bedhampton Village* – and take a self-guided walk,

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following in the footsteps of John Keats and others who have built and shaped the village throughout its fascinating history. Discover where the biscuit factory was, the Poorhouse and the freshwater springs that made Bedhampton famous. There will also be a small display inside St Thomas's Church outlining details of Keats visit to Bedhampton

The Secret Bookshop and The Waterloo Room at The Elms will be open on both Saturday and Sunday for refreshments between 10am and 3pm where visitors will also be able to view a large (3 metre) 1825 map of the Parish of Bedhampton. There is free parking is available at Bidbury Mead Recreation Ground

The celebrations will close with 'Romance is my Religion': a special Evensong service held in St Thomas's Church at 3.30pm on Sunday 27 January.

John Keats was the last of the Romantic poets to be born and sadly, the first to die. He was a key figure in the second generation of the Romantic poets along with his contemporaries, Lord Byron and Percy Shelley. In his short life; his work having been in publication for only four years before his death, he was attacked by the critics and branded in derogatory terms as a 'cockney poet'. Yet his genius and the value of his writing were not recognised during his lifetime or in the years immediately after his death in 1821 at the age of just 25.

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For more information

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JOHN KEATS  
**200**  
IN BEDHAMPTON