Keats love letter returns home

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Benjamin Zephaniah, Poet-in-Residence, Michael Welbank, City of London Corporation and Wesley Kerr, Chairman of the HLF London Committee, gathered at Keats House to celebrate.

The love letter was written by the poet, John Keats, to Fanny Brawne at Wentworth Place (now Keats House) in 1820. It was the last remaining Keats letter in private ownership and had for 70 years been kept in the USA.

It was purchased at auction by the City of London Corporation, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), the V&A Purchase Grant Fund, the Friends of the National Libraries and The Friends of Keats House in March this year for £80,000. The letter has now come home to where it was written.

In the letter, Keats wrote: "I shall Kiss your name and mine where your Lips have been - Lips! why should a poor prisoner as I am talk about such things." He said his "consolation" was "in the certainty of your affection". Fanny Brawne lived next door to him in Hampstead, north London. "You had better not come today," was scribbled on the outside of the letter.

Michael Welbank, Chairman of the Keats House Management Committee of the City of London Corporation, said: "We are absolutely thrilled to be able to display the letter where it was written. Keats is a hugely important part of our cultural landscape. This letter, and the many other items on display at Keats' House, will help visitors from home and abroad to gain an even deeper understanding of Keats' life, and the passions that drove him to produce such wonderful work."

Wesley Kerr, Chairman of the London Region Heritage Lottery Fund, said: “John Keats famously wrote that “a thing of beauty is a joy forever.” His deep, doomed love for Fanny Brawne was a thing of beauty which still burns brightly nearly two centuries after this unique letter was written. The Heritage Lottery Fund’s London Committee is thrilled to have enabled this purchase so that countless generations in the future will be able to see close up the powerful words penned by Keats at the evocative, superbly restored villa where he wrote them.”

Notes to editors

Keats House
Keats House in Hampstead, London is where the poet John Keats (1795-1821) lived from 1818 to 1820, and is the setting that inspired some of Keats’s most memorable poetry. Here, Keats wrote “Ode to a Nightingale” and fell in love with Fanny Brawne, the girl next door. It was from this house that he travelled to Rome, where he died of tuberculosis aged just 25.

Keats House is managed by the City of London Corporation as part of its contribution to the heritage and cultural life of London and the nation. The interior of Keats House has been sensitively and painstakingly restored thanks to a Heritage Lottery Fund grant of £424,000. The culmination of four years of preparation and research work, the refurbishment sought to reflect the original decoration of the property, creating a living space that Keats would have recognised and providing an authentic example of Regency style. It is open to visitors as a museum and literary centre hosting many events, poetry readings and family activities.

The Keats House Summer Festival takes place 28 May – 5 June 2011 with Benjamin Zephaniah as Poet in Residence. The letter will be on display during the festival.

Further information

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