

John Keats in 1819



A study morning

led by

Dr Elaine Oswald

Monday 15 July 2019

from 10-1 p.m.

William Elder Building

56-58 Castlegate

Berwick, TD15 1JT

1819 was monumental in the life of John Keats, aged 23. It was his creative *annus mirabilis*, being the year he wrote many of the poems for which he is most remembered, his Great Odes, *The Eve of St Agnes*, and *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. He met and chatted, about “a thousand things”, with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a hero of his; and Fanny Brawne, the woman he loved, moved in next-door.

It was also a year started in grief, as his brother Tom had died in December 1818; and the year in which Keats himself recognised that he too was dying from the tuberculosis that had killed his brother. He was also suffering from a multitude of financial troubles throughout the year, including concerns over his brother, George, who, after emigrating to America, was badly in need of money.

Political and social tensions were also running high: in August, protesters about the country's dire economic conditions were killed by governmental authorities in the Peterloo Massacre, a defining moment of the age.

When Keats died at 25, he had been writing poetry seriously for only about six years, and publishing for only four years. In his lifetime, sales of Keats' three volumes of poetry probably amounted to only 200 copies. The compression of his poetic apprenticeship and maturity into so short a time is just one remarkable aspect of Keats' work.

Although prolific during his short career, and now one of the most studied and admired Romantic poets, his reputation rests on a small body of work, centred on the Odes, and it was only in the creative outpouring of the last years of his short life that he was able to express the inner intensity for which he has been lauded since his death.

Keats was convinced that he had made no mark in his lifetime. Aware that he was dying, he wrote to Fanny Brawne in February 1820, "I have left no immortal work behind me – nothing to make my friends proud of my memory – but I have lov'd the principle of beauty in all things, and if I had had time I would have made myself remember'd. "

Tickets £9, including refreshments. All are welcome and no previous knowledge is assumed.

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(Keats)

