

PRESS RELEASE

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Poet Laureate unveils world's first statue of Keats

Guy's and St Thomas' Charity and The Friends of Guy's Hospital have joined forces to commission a bronze statue of the nineteenth century poet John Keats, seated outside Guy's Hospital. The figure was unveiled on Tuesday 23 October at a ceremony conducted by Andrew Motion, Poet Laureate and Keats biographer.

The donation from the Friends included gifts from the The D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust, the Keats Shelley Memorial fund and many contributions made in memory of Dr Robert Knight. Dr Knight qualified in medicine from Guy's Hospital Medical School, training and working at Guy's throughout his lifetime. He was a Consultant Physician with a special interest in chest diseases and the medical problems of women with breast cancer.

A lifelong Keats enthusiast who lectured on the subject and coordinated the Keats' Society at Guy's, Dr Knight first suggested a statue of Keats on the hospital grounds to commemorate his formative medical experiences. Born in 1795 the Romantic poet John Keats, perhaps best known for his odes, trained as a surgeon-apothecary at Guy's Hospital from 1815-16 and lived on nearby St Thomas Street. He chose not to practice after qualifying, put off by the gruesome aspects of nineteenth-century surgery, and turned instead to poetry as a full time occupation.

Andrew Motion believes that quitting the hospital "did not mean rejecting medicine altogether. Keats had previously concentrated on healing the body, he would now heal the mind." As the poet himself wrote, in a line that has been carved into the oak spandrel around the statue, "Sure a poet is a sage; A humanist, physician to all men".

Motion unveiled the statue in the week of Keats' birthday, reminding us that: "Keats never gave up his allegiance to Apollo, patron god of both poetry and healing. I'm surprised that he hasn't been commemorated in such a way before. In my own experience it is a pleasure to get involved in art while unwell. It not only takes your mind off things, but is cathartic, giving you the chance to redress a personal balance destabilised by the experience of being ill and out of control, and to reassert yourself. I have long been a supporter of art and healthcare schemes and wish more was done to integrate the two."

Stuart Williamson, a Fellow of the Royal British Society of Sculptors and Member of the Society of Portrait Sculptors created the 150 kilo piece, referring to Keats' life mask, paintings and drawings for inspiration. He agrees with Motion's take on Keats' character: "I wanted the statue to represent Keats as realistically as possible, debunking the myth that portrays him as a passive creature of the senses and reflecting his often radical and robust nature. The sculpture is meant to show Keats in a contemplative mood, as if perhaps in a moment of reflection or composition."

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Karen Sarkissian, Director of Art and Heritage at Guy's and St Thomas' Charity said: "We are delighted to have been able to work with such a renowned sculptor and to provide the local area with a new artistic icon. We hope the work inspires those who sit with Keats to rest, contemplate and feel more positively about their time in hospital - whether they are a patient, visitor, member of staff or student.

The support of Poet Laureate Andrew Motion and guests from the literary, artistic and local community at the inauguration demonstrates the high regard in which such projects are held and highlights the importance of maintaining and contributing to the history of art at Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust and King's College London."

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Notes to editors

1. For images please contact Laura Mason, Communications Assistant, Guy's and St Thomas' Charity, on Tel: 020 7188 9083, email: laura.mason@gsttcharity.org.uk, or out of hours on Tel: 07722 119175.
2. Guy's and St Thomas' Charity is the largest NHS-related charity in the UK. It provides funding to support health services in Lambeth and Southwark and to benefit the wider NHS. The art and heritage programme aims to make health service environments more welcoming and provide the best possible atmosphere for recovery and rehabilitation. For more information contact Laura Mason (as above) or visit the website: www.gsttcharity.org.uk
3. Guy's and St Thomas' provides ¾ million patient contacts in acute and specialist hospital services every year. As one of the biggest NHS Trusts in the UK, it employs around 9,000 staff. The Trust also works in partnership with the Schools of Medicine, Dentistry, Nursing and Biomedical Sciences of King's College London and other Higher Education Institutes to deliver high quality education and research. Website: www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk
4. King's College London is the fourth oldest university in England with more than 13,700 undergraduates and nearly 6,200 graduate students in nine schools of study based at five London campuses.

King's has a particularly distinguished reputation in the humanities, law, international relations, medicine and dentistry, nursing and the sciences, and has played a major role in many of the advances that have shaped modern life, such as the discovery of the structure of DNA. Please visit the website for more information: www.kcl.ac.uk