

Report on our Robert Frost Centenary Event (15th September)

“The English Years of Robert Frost”



Beaconsfield Robert Frost Event

Left to right: Mrs Rachel Leary, Tom Leary (Minister Counsellor for Public Affairs, American Embassy), Linda Hart, Mayor Graham Corney, Kari Dorme, Les Davies (President Beaconsfield Society), Gabriel Woolf

To mark the centenary of Robert Frost's arrival in England, capacity audiences of around 80 filled the Beaconsfield Fitzwilliams Centre for each of the afternoon and evening sessions of “The English Years of Robert Frost”, performed by Linda Hart and Gabriel Woolf.

The event - which vividly brought to life the time that Robert Frost and his family lived in Beaconsfield - was a real Anglo-American occasion. Tom Leary (the Minister Counsellor for Public Affairs at the American Embassy) and his wife were among our VIP guests. They enjoyed it so much that they said they wanted to come to the Society's next event in November at Penn church.

The performance was both impressive and engaging, and revealed new insights into the origin of some of Frost's poetry. Linda Hart played the part of the narrator with her precisely scripted account of Frost's 18 month residence in the town, alternating with Gabriel Woolf's superb readings of Frost's poems and letters in a wonderful New England accent. The audience found it very moving when Gabriel spoke of the friendship between Robert Frost and Edward Thomas. Even those who had not previously read Frost's work said they were stimulated to do so now. People were impressed with the advertising and the printed programme, and by the arrangements in the hall.

The event was as much about local history as it was about Robert Frost. Linda's well-researched script outlined the Frost Family's time over here. Many of Robert and Elinor Frost's letters that they wrote back to America were read by Gabriel, giving fascinating details of what it was like to live in the town in 1912. We learned the story of how Robert Frost, when he first stepped off the train from London, saw the sign of AC Frost the estate agents, how he rented 'The Bungalow' from Alfred Frost - and as they had children the same age, how they became friends. In particular, it was very obvious that Frost did not like our English weather. Frost complained of the rain and the mud, which was quite

different from what he was used to back home! Gabriel read a letter to a New York magazine editor about Beaconsfield's literary connections that Frost wrote from the Bungalow on 15th September 1912, exactly a century to the day before our two performances. We learned about their visit to Jordans to see the resting place of William Penn and about Frost's visit to London to find a publisher and to meet other poets.

One of our attendees was Belinda Avery of High March School, who had heard about the event at Beaconsfield Now! 2012. She was so impressed with the performance that she asked Linda Hart to visit the school in November to talk about Frost. Another member of the audience said it was "as good as the West End."

In his speech of thanks, our Chairman Sandy Saunders said how important it was to recognise and salute Beaconsfield's local history as well as to celebrate the work of the town's famous literary figures. In addition to Robert Frost, many other writers also found inspiration here – notably Edmund Burke, Edmund Waller, GK Chesterton, Terry Pratchett, and the children's authors Alison Uttley and Enid Blyton. He felt that this event might well herald an annual festival. What do you think?

Robert Frost, America's premier poet, is part of the town's rich heritage, and I think we did him proud at this centenary event. It was an important - but sometimes forgotten - part of the town's history and now the story has been told. This event has raised the profile of the Beaconsfield Society and the town. We even recruited some more members! Long may we continue to build on this local interest.

Kari Dorne (Committee member and event organiser)

