

Poetry in motion

A new exhibition in Fulham celebrates the work of much-loved writer Eleanor Farjeon

PARSON'S GREEN

IN a Village where I've been
They keep their Parson on a Green.
They tie him to a Juniper Tree
And bring him Currant Bread for tea.
A jollier man I've never seen
Than the one on Parson's Green.



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2016 marks the centenary of when Eleanor Farjeon's *Nursery Rhymes of London Town* was first published. Battersea, Hammersmith, King's Cross and Parson's Green all feature in this collection of quirky and timeless nursery rhymes.

Eleanor Farjeon was one of the best-loved writers of the pre-war years, producing countless volumes of stories, poetry, plays and

biography, many still read today. What's most enduring about Farjeon's work is that her rhyme, *Cats sleep anywhere* is still being taught in schools today and *Morning has Broken* is still sung in churches across the country.

The wacky illustrations that accompany Farjeon's rhymes were created by MacDonald Gill, a notable illustrator and graphic artist of the first half of the 20th century. He was also

known for his humorous map posters of London. His illustrations are distinctive yet quirky and work in perfect harmony with the images conjured up by Farjeon's nursery rhymes.

Jenny Conlon spoke with MacDonald Gill's great niece, Caroline Walker, who has spent the past decade researching and investigating her great uncle's work. She and co-creator Anne Harvey are responsible for putting together a *Nursery Rhymes of London Town* centenary exhibition in Fulham this month. Caroline does not believe that her great uncle ever met Eleanor Farjeon in person.

She explained, "I believe there's no record of Eleanor ever meeting my great uncle as they were put in touch in 1916 by a mutual acquaintance, Joseph Thorpe, who recognised that with Eleanor's play on words and my great uncle's play on art, they would be a synchronised match made in heaven. As part of the exhibition we will have a letter on display which was written by Eleanor to my great uncle where she expressed her thanks and admired his work. There will also be a unique display of original items including first editions and photos."

Caroline went on to explain the real reason why Farjeon began writing the utterly charming nursery rhymes. "She initially started the series of nursery rhymes for her little niece Joan, who was the child she never had, which is rather poignant." Caroline also spoke about how Farjeon sometimes conveyed her own life experiences in her rhymes. "Writers and poets usually put themselves into the centre of their works and this was the case with several of Eleanor's nursery rhymes. For example, the *Kings Cross* nursery rhyme was about her little brother who would sometimes have terrible tantrums."

Originally enjoyed by *Punch* readers, these witty rhymes were extremely popular with both adults and children and are still as entertaining and relevant today. A truly timeless exhibition.

■ **The display is at Fulham Library 14 November-4 December 2016 with talks by Anne Harvey and Caroline Walker at 6.30pm on 22 November.**
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