

Mark Rutherford (William Hale White) anniversary

Mark Rutherford, born William Hale White, in Bedford in 1831 had his life celebrated last Saturday 22nd June commemorating the 100th anniversary of his death on Mark 14th 1913. The Symposium, organised by the Mark Rutherford Society, and held at Dr Williams's Library was opened by his great grandson, John Hale-White and chaired by Professor of English Literature at the University of Bedfordshire, Bob Owens.

William Hale White is best known for six novels written under the name Mark Rutherford and published between 1881 and 1896: *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford* (1881); *Mark Rutherford's Deliverance* (1885); *The Revolution in Tanner's Lane* (1887); *Miriam's Schooling* (1890); *Catherine Furze* (1893); and *Clara Hopgood* (1896). Hale White died on 14 March 1913.

The 'Mark Rutherford' novels share a power and style which are distinctive in the literary history of their time. George Orwell described *Mark Rutherford's Deliverance* as 'one of the best novels written in English'. D. H. Lawrence wrote, 'I have always had a great respect for Mark Rutherford . . . so thorough, so sound, and so beautiful'. Arnold Bennett regarded him as 'a novelist whom one can deeply admire'. Claire Tomalin, wrote that White's novels 'draw directly on a private store of memories and emotions, and you sense quite strongly that he took up a mask in order to be nakedly confessional in a way he could not otherwise have managed'.

William Hale White is generally regarded as the most important novelist of the nineteenth century to have emerged from a Nonconformist background and to have taken Nonconformist life and experience as his main subject. He is undeservedly neglected and the Society's aim is to redress this.

Professor Owens opened the Symposium briefly summarising Mark Rutherford's life and importance. Roger Pooley, Professor of English Literature at Keele University followed with an assessment of Nonconformist Culture and Politics in *The Revolution in Tanner's Lane*. The opening panel closed with Professor Valentine Cunningham of Oxford University on, 'Mark Rutherford and the Plight of the Dissenting Aesthete'.

After a lunch break in which academics and enthusiasts alike discussed Mark Rutherford over a buffet lunch, some early researchers were remembered. Nicholas Jacobs looked at the contribution of young German researcher Hans Klinke who wrote his thesis in the late 1920's as well as noting that there were translations of his books in French, Italian and Czech as well as Japanese. Nick Wilde read a letter from 95 year old American Wilfred Stone recalling his work on Rutherford in the 1950's and Mike Brealey (author of *Bedford's Victorian Pilgrim* 2012) told us about an early British pioneer, Henry Arthur Smith whose thesis appeared in 1938. The afternoon concluded with Jean-Michel Yvard, from the University of Angiers in France who discussed whether Mark Rutherford was an agnostic or a believer and Max Saunders Professor of English at Kings College, London, (author of *Self Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature*) spoke about the nature of fictional autobiography.

The day finished with an entertaining monologue by Mark Crees, Chair of the Mark Rutherford Society imagining himself at Mark Rutherford's grave in Groombridge, Kent.

From Wednesday 12th June - Sunday 28th July there is an exhibition at Honeywood Museum, Carshalton to mark the centenary of the death of this important author, who made Carshalton his home. You will discover how he kept his books secret from his family; and why he insisted on nine-inch thick brick walls to divide the rooms in his house. Hale White lived a number of parallel lives but still, at 55, found time to learn to ride a boneshaker bicycle! The exhibition also gives insights into the Victorian Carshalton that he knew for almost 30 years. On 12th July at 7.30pm Mark Rutherford's People - A selection of readings by Mark Crees Tickets are £3.50 (£3.00 Friends) Bookings 020 8770 4297 and on Saturday 13th July Saturday 13th July 2.30pm a guided walk to places in Carshalton associated with William Hale White.