

Press Release

Rare Book Collection and Recordings at St Stephen's Church Cinderford

**Celebration of Forest Literary Talent,
part of £3m Lottery Heritage Programme and Heritage Open Days**

An Exhibition of the Life and Work of Leonard Clark

Saturday 10th September 2016 10.00am- 4.00pm

Visitors to St Stephen's Church Cinderford on Saturday will get an opportunity to see a rare book collection and hear some recently discovered recordings all related to the poet and educationalist, Leonard Clark. He was a prolific author and editor, and the highlight of the exhibition is the opportunity to see a collection of his entire catalogue of written work, stretching from 1923 until his death in 1981, comprising over one hundred books. Visitors will also get the opportunity to hear recordings of Clark reading his own work loaned by the British Sound Library. The University of Gloucestershire, Reading the Forest Project, have organised the exhibition supported by the Heritage Open Days scheme and Cinderford Churches.

The rare book collection is the property of Newnham on Severn business man and local history enthusiast, David Price. The publican and manager of the Railway Inn was entranced by a book by Leonard Clark he was given for Christmas by his father, when he was just a boy. He connected with Clark's stories of growing up in the Forest and his appreciation of the landscape and trees. His love of Clark's poetry and stories led him to start collecting his books and those of other Forest writers. However, Clark has remained his favourite, and he has amassed a vast collection of his books over the years and become one of the acknowledged experts on the poet. He met the London based daughter of the late Cinderford poet and author earlier in the year and was delighted to be able to show her the collection, and also many places such as Abbots and Chestnut Wood that feature in poems and stories.

Leonard or 'Bob' as he was known was raised in Belle Vue Road. He was a protégé of the Yorkley poet FW Harvey and his first work was published just after the First World War. He became a teacher and educationalist, authoring poems and books for adults and children. He lived in many parts of Britain and became an important literary figure in the UK and USA, where his poetry for children was very influential. His biographies of his childhood and adolescence in the Forest, *A Fool in the Forest*, *Green Wood* and *Grateful Caliban* are still popular. The exhibition will include a full description of his life and career and early photographs loaned by his family.

The exhibition is free and refreshments will be available all day. The organisers, **Jason Griffiths** and **Roger Deeks** are also hoping to see local people who may remember Leonard or his adopted family and the characters and places depicted in his books. The event is sponsored by the **Forester's Forest**, the **Heritage Lottery Funded** project funded to raise the profile of Forest heritage.

David Price said: *I am delighted that my collection of Leonard Clark books will be available for people to see. Some of them are extremely rare. They are packed with references to the Forest. A look inside any of them shows how much he loved the Forest and Foresters.*

Roger Deeks said: *It is a great venue for the exhibition. St Stephen's was Leonard Clark's own church that he regularly attended. He came back to the church to get married and finally had his ashes laid to rest here. We are very grateful to Rachel Witham and Cinderford Churches for their help and support.*

Jason Griffiths said: *Dennis Potter described Leonard Clark as the gentlest 'and the most perceptive guardian of his Forest-borne recollections he nourished the flame of our common Forest heritage'. This is a great opportunity to learn more about him.*

For further details please see:

[@readingthefod](#)

<https://www.facebook.com/readingtheforest/>

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University of Gloucestershire

Reading the Forest.

Pictures:

The collection of books by Leonard Clark

David Price and Mary-Louise Clark, Leonard Clark's daughter

The Commemorative plaque marking where Leonard Clark's Ashes in St Stephen's