

# William Blake & John Linnell – the Suburb connection

MARIE-CHRISTINE O'CALLAGHAN

At the very edge of the land that was to become Hampstead Garden Suburb, there was a farmhouse called Wyldes Farm which was probably built in the 1600s.

The house survived through the years, with some modifications and, in 1824, it was rented to John Linnell a painter who originally had a thriving portrait practice. Linnell is now mainly known as a painter of 'typical uneventful English lands' rich in poetic feeling and glowing in colour. His paintings made him one of the nineteenth century wealthiest landscape artists. The blue plaque commemorating Linnell also mentions William Blake stayed with him as his guest. Despite the difference in age (Linnell was 26 and Blake 61 when they first met) there was an immediate affinity between the two men. Both considered that the natural world was a reflection of the spiritual world. They were also both proud of their working-class origins and



John Linnell by John Linnell (detail), circa 1860 (Photo: National Portrait Gallery, London)

not ready to conform to the niceties of polite society. Blake was largely unrecognised during his lifetime but Linnell admired Blake's work and supported him both artistically and financially. He commissioned engravings for the Book of Job which are now considered Blake's greatest masterpieces in the medium of engravings. When Blake died in 1827, his wife Catherine paid for his funeral with money lent to her by Linnell. The Literary Chronicle in their obituary of Blake described him as "one of those ingenious

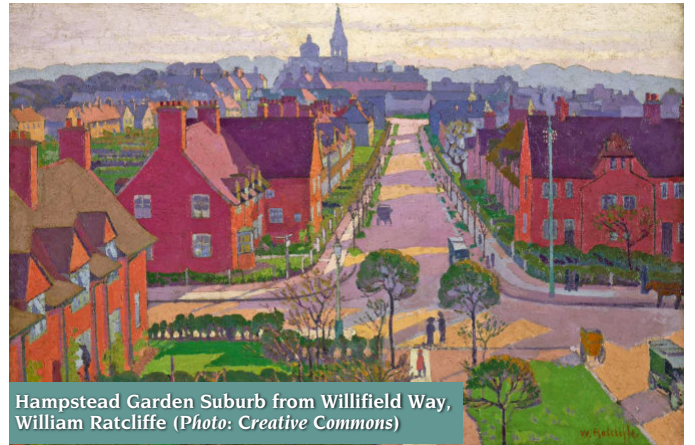
persons... whose eccentricities were still more remarkable than their professional abilities." And yet, today, William Blake is considered a seminal figure in the history of the poetry and visual art of the Romantic Age.

In 1906, Raymond Unwin moved in to Wyldes Farm, a year after Henrietta Barnett commissioned him to plan the new garden suburb in association with Edwin Landseer Lutyens, thus establishing Wyldes Farm (now known as Old Wyldes) with a connection to the Suburb.

Illustration from 'The Book of Job' by William Blake. Plate 14, When the Morning Stars Sang Together (Photo: Creative Commons)



Garden under Snow, John Whitlock Codner (Photo: RWA – Royal West of England Academy)



Hampstead Garden Suburb from Willifield Way, William Ratcliffe (Photo: Creative Commons)

## Ratcliffe, Codner and Charoux

MARIE-CHRISTINE O'CALLAGHAN

The Tate exhibits a painting called Hampstead Garden Suburb from Willifield Way. Painted around 1914 by William Ratcliffe, it shows the view along Willifield Way in what was then a very new Hampstead Garden Suburb. The houses along the road are a mixture of shapes and sizes with plenty of vegetation illustrating the Garden Suburb's attempt to 'fuse the ideals of town and country'. The geometric lines marking out the houses, roads and gardens give a sense of order. There are three motor cars being driven along the spacious roads giving a sense of things to come. The bright complementary colours of red, green, purple and yellow are typical of the post-impressionistic Camden Town Group to which the artist belonged.

In 1912, Ratcliffe moved to the Suburb to live with his brother. He was, presumably, given access to The Club House which was the social centre of the Suburb, as he created his painting from the roof of the Club House. Unfortunately, the Club House was

destroyed by the Luftwaffe in 1940.

In the years that followed Ratcliffe's painting, Willifield Way was home to two other artists who both lived at 26 Willifield Way, though at different times.

John Codner (1913-2008) lived at 26 Willifield Way as a young man. Codner was a camouflage officer in the Middle East, part of a squad that created the appearance of army units where none existed as well as concealing the real tanks and field guns. After the war he studied at the Regents Street Polytechnic School of Art and became a figure painter. He exhibited his paintings at the Royal Academy.

Siegfried Charoux (1898-1967) was born in Vienna and studied at the Vienna School of Arts. In 1935, his left-wing political views forced him to flee to England to escape the Nazis. Charoux was a sculptor working in bronze, stone and terracotta. He became a full member of the Royal Academy in 1956. His sculpture 'The Neighbours' can be seen in Highbury Quadrant Estate in Islington. Austria did eventually acknowledge him and awarded him the Gold medal of the city of Vienna in 1966.

The Neighbours, Siegfried Charoux



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