



John Constable's Hampstead Heath – the view from above the Vale of Health pond, looking north-east towards the neighbouring village of Highgate

Constable's Hampstead

ESTELLE LOVATT

English Romantic landscape artist, John Constable RA (1776-1837), loved living in Hampstead. He felt a connection with the Heath and NW3 village, saying, "Here, Hampstead, let me take my everlasting rest."

Constable, born in East Bergholt, Suffolk, found himself lecturing, teaching and living in different houses in Hampstead after he fell in love with the location whilst he was a student at the Royal Academy, walking from the city up to the Heath, to paint the panoramas. He said he was able to walk, the "three miles from door to door [from Central London to Hampstead] see nature, and unite a town and country life."

Constable found the early Georgian and Regency Hampstead to be pure liberating comfort on his doorstep, providing refuge from the crowded polluted City. Since his wife was of ill-health, the

family moved to live in Hampstead, for the freshest air, which, as Constable said, being 400 feet higher than the City of London, meant, "Hampstead is the lungs of London" with "the finest views, unsurpassed in Europe, from Westminster to Gravesend, Kent, and the dome of St Paul's."

Constable spent the last 18 years of his life in Hampstead. Painting the views, with much artistic licence, to include in the distance, as he'd said, "views of Child's Hill, fields in Hendon, church spires in Harrow on the Hill, and even Windsor Castle." Drawing labourers at work on the Heath, tending cows and sheep, beneath the ash, birch, elm, oak and fir trees, around hedge rows near the ponds. Believing, "Painting is with me but another word for feeling."

Hampstead is where he did his painterly research and experiments. Including his clumps of cloud studies for his most famous

masterpiece, The Hay Wain, (National Gallery, London), which is of the River Stour between Suffolk and Essex, but Constable also painted this scene from his 'en plein air' drawings he'd sketched on Hampstead Heath, and on his easel in the shed, located in the backyard of his Hampstead home. Constable looked to the wilder landscape and skies of Hampstead Heath instead of formal city parks, saying they were artificially

cultivated spaces, "the gentleman's park is my aversion. It's not beauty because it's not nature." Stipulating, "My art is found under every hedge; in every lane – therefore no one thinks it's worth picking... [But] the landscape is too large to go unnoticed... [and the] Canvas takes the place of God's work; the landscape is God's plan in eye; because since the Creation, no two days are alike, no two hours are alike. No two trees are alike. No two leaves are alike."

As the great artist said, "Every day in Hampstead makes me long for a walk," before painting his last canvas of Hampstead, 'Hampstead Heath with a Rainbow', 1836, of Branch Hill Pond, (Tate Britain).

He advanced the art of landscape painting. As a stunning handler of paint he had an amazing technique capturing the experience of being outside in nature, in the landscape. With many tones of green shades so naturalistic, he broke up the surface of his canvas, using, as he said, "a thousand greens to capture the complexity of nature's beauty." Constable went on to inspire many artists including Monet, Cezanne and Lucian Freud.

Constable is buried in the family tomb, alongside his wife Maria, and their children, in Saint John's Parish Church, Church Row, Hampstead.

To join Estelle's 'Walk and Paint Constable's Hampstead' event please see estellelovatt.com or estellelovatt.eventbrite.com.

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