

COLERIDGE on the Suburb

Born in Devon in 1772, the last of ten children, with his father a vicar and schoolmaster, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, is best known as poet and author of 'The Ancient Mariner' and 'Kubla Khan'. Many who do not recall poetry remember the opening lines of both: "It is an Ancient Mariner, and he stoppeth one of three . . ." and "In Xanadau did Kubla Khan a stately pleasure dome decree . . .".

The public man

Like so many who gave their names to closes and walks of the Suburb, he was much more than a poet. Indeed, he was one of the few who might have walked over what is now Coleridge Walk when he lived in The Grove, Highgate, during the final years of his life.

Coleridge was a thinker, dreamer, philosopher and speaker. Both religion and social

justice played an important part in his life. The French Revolution influenced him. He believed it heralded the millennium with the end of privilege and corrupt government. He spoke out against slavery at a time when it was not fashionable to do so. When Pitt suspended the Habeas Corpus Act, he wrote a vehement sonnet in the *Morning Chronicle*, likening him to Judas Iscariot.



Wonderful brickwork in Coleridge Walk

The American Dream affected him strongly, and he nearly emigrated with a plan for twelve men and twelve women to set up a community there. He became an enthusiastic supporter of Pantisocracy, which believed the old world to be corrupt, with a need for communal religious living in the new. Several writers were prosecuted for their reformist views, but he was fortunate not to be among them.

Early years

Following the death of his father when he was ten, and the lack of a loving relationship with his mother, a place was found for him at Christ's Hospital, the London charity school. There he spent a miserable childhood. Uninterested in and incapable at sport, he was regarded as a precocious swot by his peers. Cambridge University followed, and when funds ran out and a love affair went wrong, he enlisted in the army, but was 'bought out' by friends and family a few months later, and returned to Cambridge.

His life thereafter was divided into phases. He was strongly influenced by his friends and intimates. Indeed he relied on them to help him make up his mind, since he found it difficult

to do this unaided. It was noted that, when walking, he wandered from side to side and his thinking was equally undecided.

Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy, Lamb, Southey, Byron, Carlyle, John Stuart Mill, Hazlitt, De Quincey, Blake, Keats, Cowper and Poole were all close and important influences at various periods. The first and last named were the most valuable to him.

The private man

Although sometimes called 'the poet of love', his own love life was unsatisfactory. He loved Mary Evans but never got round to marriage. So she married another, and Coleridge wed the wrong girl - Sara Fricker. Their marriage was not happy and eventually they separated. However, they managed to produce several children.

After the birth of their first child they moved to a Nether Stowey cottage in Somerset. The village remains unspoiled, with a brook running through it. The cottage where he lived from 1797 to 1800 contains Coleridge memorabilia, and is open most summer afternoons.

Wordsworth was alongside as neighbour, counsellor and friend. This was his most prolific

writing period, and both 'The Ancient Mariner' and 'Kubla Khan' were written or conceived there. His intimate collaboration with Wordsworth and Poole during this period undoubtedly contributed greatly to his writing. Coleridge called 1797 his *annus mirabilis* (as opposed to another more recently mentioned *annus horribilis*).

During this period he started taking opium, and afterwards never escaped from it. His son, David Hartley, whom he loved dearly, was born just before 1797 and later became something of a poet. Coleridge idolised Wordsworth, who he regarded as a superior being. Together they used to walk to Watchet, now a deserted small country port overlooking the Bristol Channel. It was from there that the Ancient Mariner was supposed to have embarked. Wordsworth and Coleridge then travelled to Germany for some months before moving to the Lake District, where they continued to discuss and share ideas. As a result, they would often write poems on the same theme.

His health was always poor, and in 1804 he left his family and sailed to Malta. It did not help, and some months later he returned.

The sage of Highgate

The final phase of his life began in 1816 when he moved to The Grove in Highgate. He lived in the house of, and under the care of, Dr Gillman. There was medical attention, care, comparative freedom and an element of discipline. During his earlier years he had been a substantial walker, having covered 263 miles in eight days in Scotland. He now walked on the Heath and through Kenwood.

Some of his writings during this period showed his unhappiness and mental disturbance. Other poems were not up to the standard of his earlier works. Two unusual poems were 'Hebrew Dirges' composed by his acquaintance Hyman

Hurwitz, a teacher at the Jewish School in Highgate, translated into English, then rewritten as poems by Coleridge. The first was "Israel's Lament", originally chanted in the Great Synagogue, St James's Place, Aldgate, on the day of the funeral of Princess Caroline. The second, "The Tears of a Grateful People", was chanted in the same synagogue in 1820, on the day of the funeral of George III. Neither was among Coleridge's greatest works. He died in Highgate in 1834.

In retrospect

Unhappiness, opium, idealism and lack of decision all contributed to his works and style. He believed poetry must be music. His poem "The Eolian Harp" condensed his thoughts on this. Most of his long poems were stories in poetic language. Perhaps 'The Ancient Mariner' was a blend of the guilt of Cain and his own desolation at the destruction of his ability to write good poetry.

He was an emotionally unstable, neurotic genius who was recognised as such in his lifetime by his peers and by the public. He spoke brilliantly and convincingly, and welcomed visitors in Highgate, who would listen to his lengthy monologues. Like Ruskin, he had a spirit of resistance to the mechanisation of the human world and spirit. All life came together for him as part of a mysterious unity. What an inventive mind he possessed! His careful and discriminating use of words set him on a pedestal. Without his fellow poets and thinkers alongside, to whom he could defer for advice, he was incapable of producing important works.

Ruskin, Turner and Coleridge, all idealists in a time of change, represented a peak in English art, thinking and culture. Their names provide a special flavour to our Suburb.

John M Davies

Seasons in the Suburb

When Spring arrives it's quite superb
To see the trees in the Suburb,
In Kingsley Way and Litchfield too.
The Almond trees burst forth anew.
To see the blossoms all burst out
It is Nature's best without a doubt.
It surely takes my breath away
To see the blossoms every day.
The flowers of sugar pink and white
Need the gentle Spring sunlight
But all too soon - a windy day
And all the blossom blows away
Then green leaves begin to grow.
Nature has given us her show.

Now Autumn comes with days of cold.
The leaves turn red & brown & gold
And very soon that big old oak
Will drop her green magnificent cloak
The branches will look old and dry.
The rain clouds come and they seem to
cry.
But then the Autumn sun shines on
The golden leaves that have hung on
So then you know it's not for keeps
It's only while the Season sleeps.

We think of Winter as the end
Of all the Seasons that Nature sends
But really it's a time of rest
For some of the Suburb's special
guests.

Some birds fly off to warmer climes
They're not bird-brained - but clever
minds!
We throw out bread and nuts and
crumbs
And watch for when the Robin comes,
This little bird just gives us hope
That till next Spring
We all will cope.

Barbara Bliss

When Summer comes the days are long
We listen to the Blackbird's song
The roses bloom in all their glory
We meet old friends & swap a story
We laze about on Summer days.
And stroll along the park byways.
We have a moan about the rain
When the Bar-B-Q went down the
drain!
But before we know, the Summer's gone
Together with the Blackbird's song.

Hampstead Garden Suburb

The Trust and L B Barnet's Design Guidance booklet has been produced to guide residents towards the best way of going about alterations to their homes and to explain why this very special place requires, and should inspire, the highest standards in the treatment of its buildings and gardens.

It also explains the necessary procedures for making applications to the Trust and Barnet for any changes to your property.

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- Design Guidance -

HAMPSTEAD - GARDEN - SUBURB - TRUST

Simple door canopies are to be found on many Suburb houses. Elaborate door cases or porticos are completely out of character.

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