

STARRY NIGHT OVER PETERSHAM

As the Tate gears up to host the widely anticipated **Van Gogh and Britain** exhibition this month, Oonagh Turner looks to the local locations visited by the Dutch painter

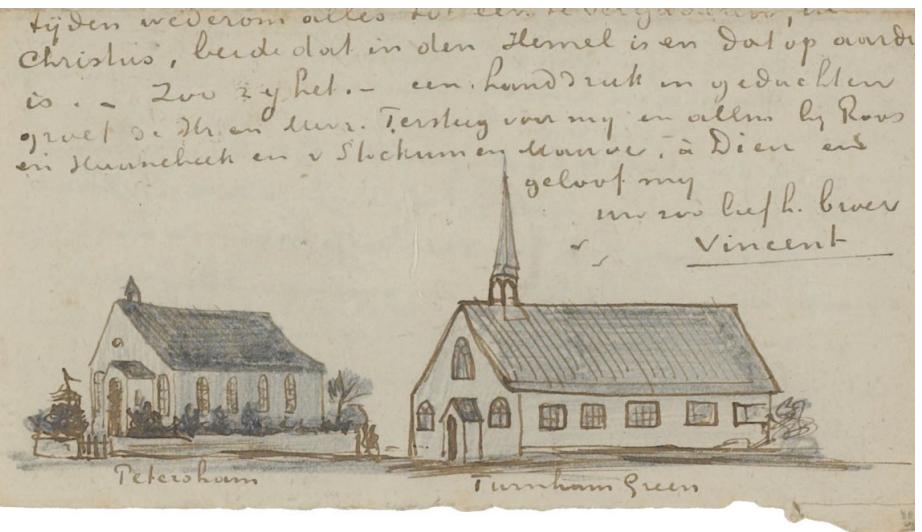
Renowned for his thick and animated brush strokes, a kaleidoscopic use of colour and for dreamy depictions of swirling landscapes and still lifes exploding with movement, Van Gogh and his legacy have inspired a world of art. His oeuvre will be coming to Tate Britain this month with 45 pieces that bring the artist's lesser-known relationship with Britain into sharp focus.

Van Gogh first ventured to Britain in the 1870s, where he lodged in Brixton for a short period, falling in love with his landlord's daughter who rejected his shy advances. He made a sketch of the house, entitled The Hackford Road, now at the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam.

The young Van Gogh was then given employment in Isleworth at a private boy's school run by a vicar. Here he lived and worked as a teacher - the building, Holme Court, remains to this day, commemorated with a blue plaque.

Van Gogh's religious upbringing as the son and grandson of ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church also brought him to nearby Petersham, where he regularly attended services at the Methodist chapel, which he sketched in letters to his brother, Theo.

Van Gogh also regularly attended services and evening readings and taught Sunday school at a church in Turnham Green which the young



Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, Vincent van Gogh Foundation

artist also sketched in letters home. He also sketched Streatham Common, although this has unfortunately been lost over time.

Van Gogh's stint in Britain during the 1870s undoubtedly framed and shaped the young artist. He visited famous institutions such as the British Museum and the National Gallery, and took inspiration from British culture and movements like the Pre-Raphaelites for his future body of work.

He expressed his enjoyment of his time abroad in a letter to Theo in 1874: "Things are going well for me here, I have a wonderful home and

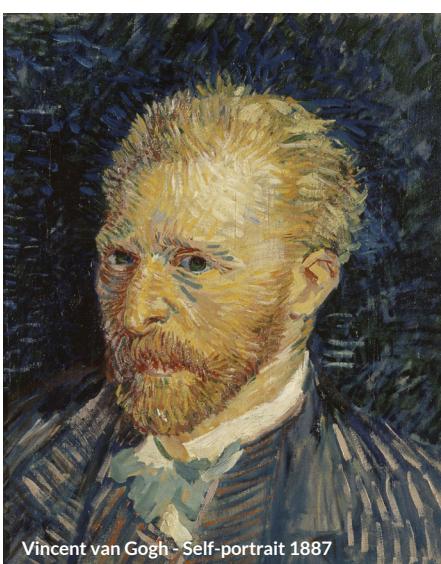
it's a great pleasure for me to observe London and the English way of life and the English themselves, and I also have nature and art and poetry, and if that isn't enough, what is?"

This source of inspiration is something the young Van Gogh took back to The Netherlands and then onwards to France where he went on to produce some of his most notable pieces of work. Arles, in particular, was the setting for Van Gogh's most artistically productive years, where the artist painted the open fields splashed with the golden sunshine of the south in his signature yellow pigment.

While his artistic output increased in Arles, he was mentally deteriorating, eventually cutting off his ear in a state of feverish self-mutilation. One of Van Gogh's final paintings, Wheatfield with Crows, was painted shortly before he took his life. It is bleak and gloomy and provides narrative to his infamous decline.

The 45 pieces by Van Gogh that recount the young artist's time in the UK is what this special exhibition at the Tate will bring to the fore. The exhibition will also shine a light on British artists inspired by Van Gogh – Francis Bacon and David Bomberg to name but a few from the art world clearly shaped by the painter's extraordinary legacy.

Van Gogh and Britain is on from 27 March to 11 August. TUE



■ www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/ey-exhibition-van-gogh-and-britain