

The Big Blake Project – *BACKGROUND*

THE BLAKE SOCIETY



The Blake Society is one of England's older societies and has its base in London, Phillip Pullman is the President and Alan Moore, Michael Eavis and Neil Gaiman are patrons. They provide a wide variety of programmed events throughout the year that seek to reflect William Blake's broad spectrum of interest. While most of their cultural activities have been in London, The Blake Society has taken a great interest in the Felpham Cottage and in 2007 supported Felpham's 250th anniversary celebrations of Blake.

Earlier this year the Society secured an option to buy the cottage for £520,000 a considerable reduction on the market price of £650,000. This reduction reflected, in part, the owner's wish for the cottage to be purchased by a group of people that would take Blake back to the nation.

THE BIG BLAKE PROJECT

The Big Blake Project was established in Felpham in 2012 within Greener Bognor Network to link the local green spaces using William Blake's poetry – The Blake Trail was born! A sixteen-page colour brochure was produced in conjunction with design consultancy, Loosemarbles, to support the Trail and the founder of the project was sought by the owner of Blake's cottage and congratulated. A few months later the cottage came on the market and the owner suggested that the Big Blake Project contact the Blake Society to become part of a consortium to secure the cottage.

The Big Blake Project then established in 2013 a William Blake Poetry Prize, the quality and diversity of entries was high and came in from around the world. The Big Blake Project has now worked with five of the twelve local schools to produce works of art and mosaics for public spaces. In liaison with Chichester University, it will embark on a literacy programme based around poetry in the two local secondary schools. The poetry of William Blake is on the A level English Literature syllabus and the National Curriculum for year nine.

THE BLAKE PARTNERSHIP

The Blake Society gives ten percent of its income to encourage a work of vision. This year the award will be given for an aphorism or proverb – short pithy saying that suggests a more infinite truth. The 'aphs' will be submitted through twitter #tithegrant.

The Judge is Stephen Fry and the winner will be announced at the Blake Festival, in Felpham (18-20 September 2014). The competition will also be used to award the William Blake Poetry Prize to the winning local entrant #FAB (Felpham and Bognor). It is hoped that some of these aphs will become part of an artists' bench to be established at the Railway Station in liaison with Arun District Council.

The Blake Society is also supporting the Felpham Festival with guest speakers. We are delighted to announce that printer Michael Phillips (currently writing a biography of Blake in Lambeth) has agreed to speak at the Festival.

The Festival will be used to publically launch the campaign to buy Blake's Cottage. This is a unique and exciting opportunity to put Felpham and Bognor Regis on the worldwide map and will also serve as a keystone for regeneration of Bognor Regis.

BLAKE'S COTTAGE

Blake's Cottage could be an extraordinary asset for the nation, if successfully acquired. This is the first time that the property has come on the market in eighty-eight years and it is an exciting opportunity



not to be missed! It is a vital piece of English heritage where Blake wrote the famous hymn Jerusalem. We envisage that the cottage will become a centre of creativity and innovation continuing the work begun by Blake. Examples of literary homes which bring people to this nation include: Jane Austen's house at Chawton, The Bronte's house in the village of Howarth, and William Wordsworth's cottage in the Lake District, Turner's house in Twickenham and Hogarth's house in Hounslow to name but a few. Blake is one of the trinity of English Geniuses known throughout the world – Shakespeare, Newton and Blake – and perhaps he is the most significant of the three today because of his role as a champion of the human imagination and its importance to a modern economy.



CENTRE OF IMAGINATION

The proposal is for an iconic building, supported by the Blake Society, to serve as a Centre of Imagination in Bognor Regis with William Blake as the anchor tenant.

A building of this nature on the Regis Site will act as a powerful catalyst for the regeneration of Bognor Regis. The design of the building will follow a period of consultation with the local community where a number of options (build-costs of £8-£20 million) will be considered.

Our vision is for a centre that will be a crucible for a cultural explosion of the imagination, incorporating art, science and entertainment. This in turn, will enable the town of Bognor Regis to grow and prosper and take its place on the worldwide map.

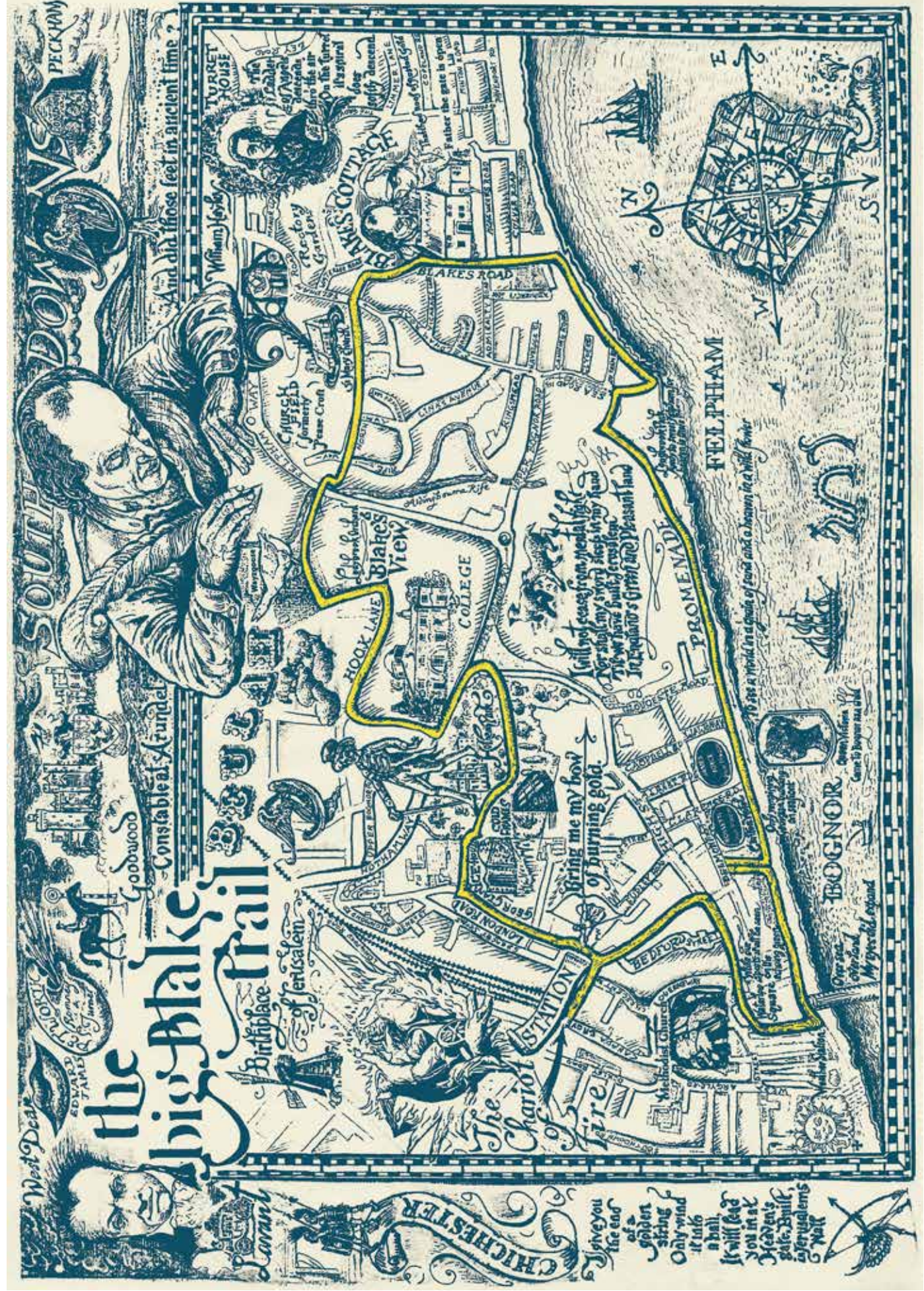
The building will house a permanent exhibition of the father of the imagination himself, William Blake! It will be a hive of activity incorporating:

- International Exhibiton Centre
- Cinema
- Theatre
- Music Venue
- Literary Centre
- Performance Art
- Family Events
- Bespoke Philosophy Café
- Visitor centre for Blake's Cottage
- High quality Restaurant chains

This proposal follows the pattern of regeneration projects that have transformed towns along the South Coast. For example: Margate – Turner Contemporary Gallery 2011 (£13.65m), Hastings – Jerwood Gallery 2012 (£4m), Bexhill – reopening of the De La Warr 2005, Eastbourne – Towner Gallery 2009 (£8.58m).

All the above have experienced a surge in visitor numbers proving to be powerful engines of economic regeneration to their local communities. For comparative purposes, a large expansive project such as the recently completed LSE new academic building was completed for less than £25 million.

We have spoken with the acclaimed Thomas Heatherwick studios who are excited by the concept of The Project and we have secured an invitation to their studios in June. Heatherwick Studios created the iconic 2012 Olympic Cauldron, the UK pavilion at the Shanghai Expo and also the award-winning East Beach Café, Littlehampton, in partnership with Littlehampton Welding.

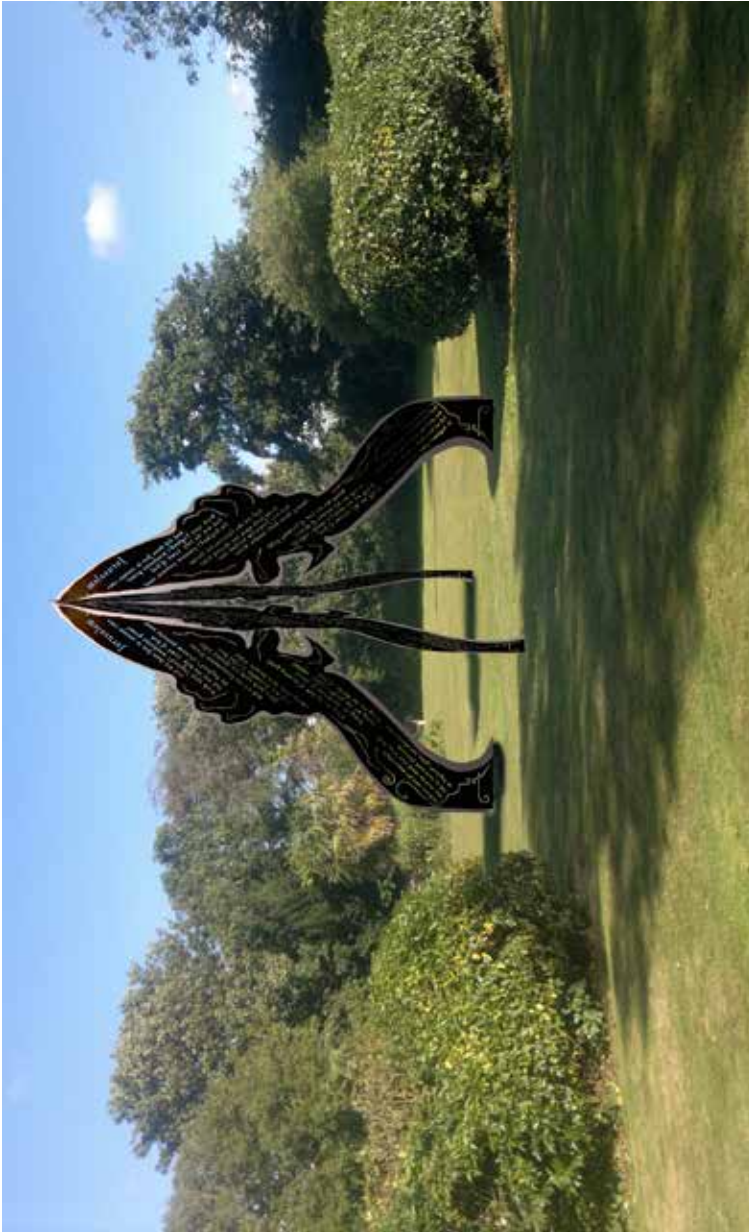


In 2014 the renowned illustrator, Chris Price was commissioned to produce an imaginative map of the trail for Felpham and Bognor Regis.

SCULPTURE ROUNABOUT

We have provided ideas for the Felpham roundabout which were well-received nationally, due both to the design and the reputation of the local artist Abby Wilkinson of Loosemarbles and Littlehampton Welders for the quality of the proposal.

PROJECT: Blake Sculpture



William Blake, Angel Wings (working title)

The project is in honour of one of England's greatest visionaries, William Blake, who wrote 'Jerusalem' while living in Felpham.

We propose a 15-20 foot sculpture of a pair of angel's wings emerging from the ground either in Rectory Park, which is close to Blake's cottage or in Longbrook Park where there is more footfall as it backs on to the promenade.

The wings would be made of steel and laser cut with a selection of Blake's writings or indeed Jerusalem. The work would be created by local business, Littlehampton Welding, who are world-class welders, known for large and innovative projects.

While there is a stained glass window dedicated to Blake in Felpham Church, there is no real acknowledgement of the great man in this village or anywhere else (apart from the erroneous blue plaque on The Fox stating that he was arrested there, where in fact, he was arrested in Chichester).

We believe this would bring visitors to the area and make a well overdue statement that Felpham is not just an attachment to Butlins but a place that inspired and continues to inspire. The idea also is that people will want to be photographed in front of the wings thus spreading the word virally.

William Blake is an enormously important part of British culture and we would suggest that the sculpture would be the next stage started by Rachel Searle's Big Blake Project and that Felpham will become known as the home of Blake.

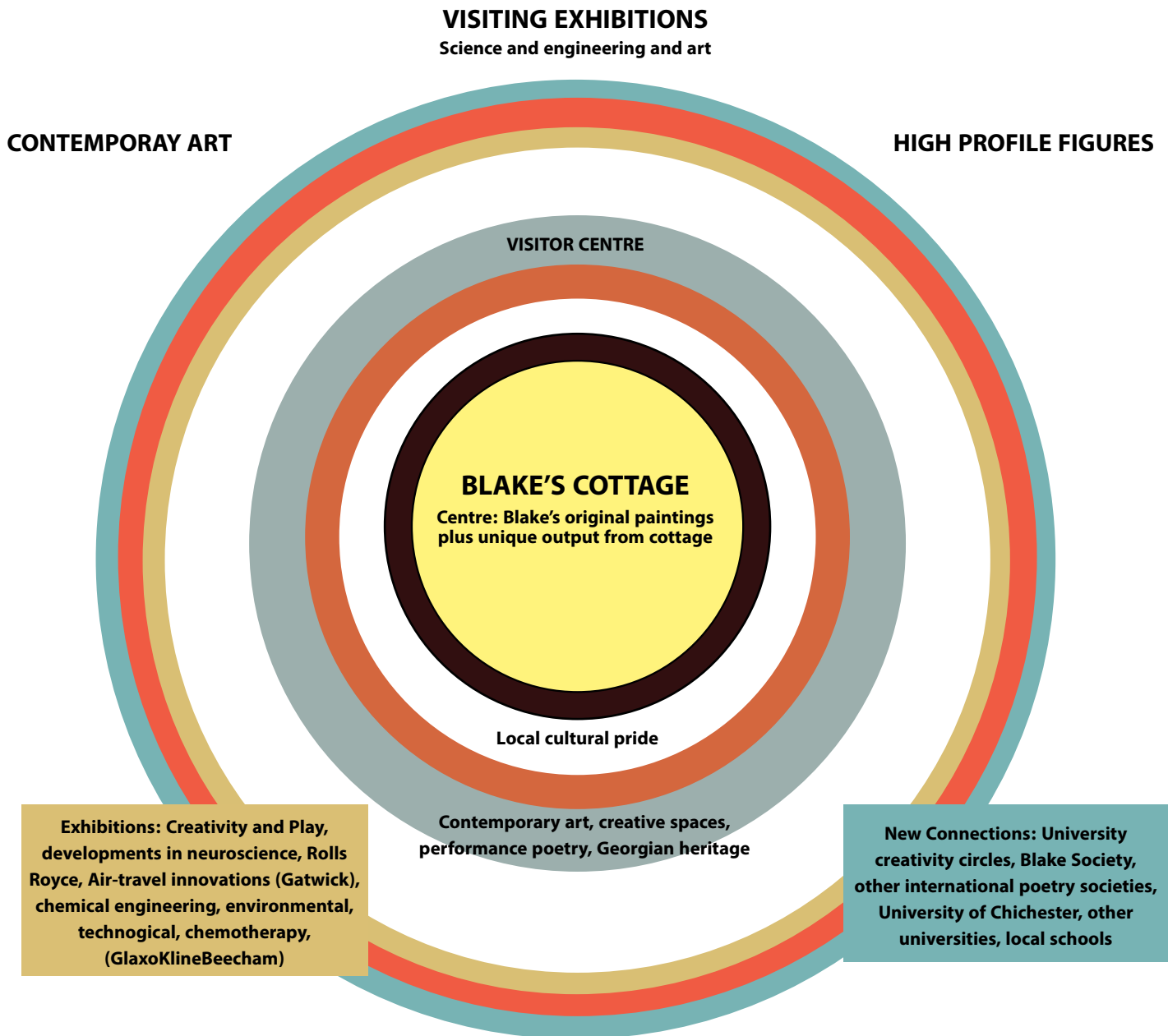
The proposition is that this would be made of laser-cut steel and embedded in the ground



Centre of imagination

How bright ideas change everything

Endless possibilities with William Blake as the anchor tenant in a Centre of the Imagination located in Bognor Regis. Should the regeneration plans be changed to incorporate this potential?



A BETTER CONNECTED TOWN:

The Blake Society, links with Tate Britain and Pallant House
Local AND international

Consider this:

1million visitors, £23million income

– Victoria Pomfrey, Turner Contemporary, Margate

CHELSEA ARTS CLUB/STEERING GROUP 21 MAY 2014

Attendees:

Rachel Searle, Will Harvey and Abby Wilkinson (Loosemarbles), Rowan Pelling, Michael daCosta Babb, Michael Pilgrim, Dorcas Pelling, Annie Blinkhorn and possibly Bronac Ferran and Rosie Millard

The purpose of the meeting is to brainstorm how to:

- i) Support The Felpham Festival
- ii) Buy the cottage
- iii) Set the ball rolling for a Centre of the Imagination.

Agenda

Introductions: Will Harvey

Update on progress to date: Tim Heath – Chair of the Blake Society

Brainstorm led by Will Harvey