

NORTHERN HEIGHTS CIRCUIT

London's open air museum : buildings,
famous people, nature, social history

HIGHGATE NORTH HILL

The most architecturally diverse
residential street in London?



Introduction

The "North Hill Challenge" is one of a series of self guided walks designed by the Highgate Society to showcase North London's heritage. These walks reveal the amazing diversity that North London offers in terms of buildings, famous people, nature and social history, all of it in the open air.

The remarkable quality of Highgate North Hill is the diversity of its building styles. Arguably no other road in London, Britain, Europe or, who knows, even the world compares with North Hill in terms of the diversity of its domestic architecture.



By organising 34 of the more interesting buildings in North Hill in the order in which they were built, it is possible to trace the evolution of English domestic architecture across a period of 500 years and ten different monarchs.

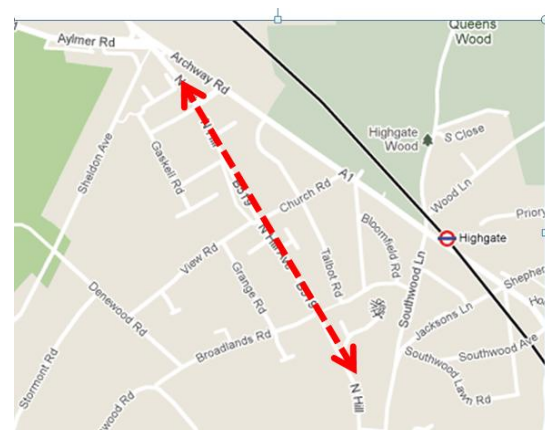
The walk, which is only 800 yards long, is designed to be done in combination with sections one and two of the Northern Heights Circuit.

The walk starts at Highpoint at the junction of North Hill and North Road Highgate. It can be reached by public transport using route 143 from Archway Underground Station or by a short walk from Highgate Underground Station.

It ends close to an Esso petrol station where North Hill meets the Archway Road at its intersection with the Great North Road and Falloden Way. The 143 bus will take return you from this point to Archway Underground Station.

Whereas many architectural walks focus on what is particular about each building, the North Hill Challenge is designed to help the reader interpret generic features which characterise English domestic buildings of different periods.

This, we hope, will enable the walker to better appreciate the buildings of other parts of London and indeed elsewhere in Britain by understanding the factors that caused them to be built the way they were.



The buildings of Highgate North Hill

The buildings of North Hill described in this version of the guide are numbered and listed in the approximate order of their construction. If you do the walk you may prefer to download from the Highgate Society website the version of the guide which is organised in walk order.

To follow this guide, ie the one in “walk” order, starting at the top of North Hill and ending at the gyrotory at the bottom, start at the entry for building number 21. At the end of its description you will be referred to the next building in walk order and so forth until you come to the bottom of the hill. Note – buildings may be on either side of the road. The left hand pavement, going down the hill, tends to provide the better view.



41 North Hill

1 : According to the plaque on this house it is the oldest surviving building on North Hill, dating from the 16th century. Its appearance is too orderly for us to mistake its exterior for a Tudor or medieval original.

It has clearly been re-modelled, probably during the Victorian period and definitely before 1918, but nevertheless in such a way as to retain a distinctively Tudor appearance by the use of black painted diagonal timbers, white plasterwork and windows with small panes of leaded glass.

Next building in walk order : 3.



60 North Hill

2 : This house is a fine example of what might be described as suburban Georgian. Its period of construction can be inferred in part from the external wall which protrudes above the roof level.

This gives important protection in the event of fire which was a particular hazard when, as would have been the case with this house, internal walls were built using wood rather than brick. Such protection was required of all residential buildings under building regulations which were introduced in response to the calamitous Fire of London in 1666.

Though the design is simple and unostentatious, the house has been built to a high standard of design and craftsmanship. Note that the weights used by the sash windows are carefully recessed behind the brickwork giving a clean and elegant window design.

The lintels are of brick and the shallow arch would have been created using a timber template, the bricks then being capable of supporting the weight of the wall above. A similar arch is found in building 19.

The porch has traces of the Greek Doric order. This is significant because the fashion for Greek rather than Roman detail is typical of the very end of the 18th century so this may have been a later modification.

The house and others of its period tend to be both wider and less deep than later houses, particularly Victorian ones. Opening on both sides of the entrance hall “dual aspect” rooms overlook the street at the front and the garden at the rear.

In times when land was much cheaper, relative to the cost of building, there was little pressure outside central London to maximise the number of dwellings for any width of road frontage.

Next building in walk order : 17.



North Hill House, 57 North Hill

3 : This villa probably dates from the Regency period 1811 - 1830, which takes its name from the period (1811 – 1820) during which the subsequent George IV acted as Prince Regent for his father George III.

The exterior reflects design features possibly resulting from the imposition by the government of a window tax to fund the cost of the Napoleonic wars. This incentivised builders to incorporate fewer but larger windows in order to maximise the light whilst minimising tax liability.

This is likely to have contributed to the inclusion of side panels, a departure from previous practice, in the design of vertical window facing the street. This innovation developed in due course into the concept of a bay window which by Victorian times had become a feature of almost every terraced house.

Note the Greek influence in the design of the porch. This reflects the widespread interest in Greek culture fashionable at the time of the Greek war of independence with Turkey, a struggle which was popularised by Lord Byron who himself fought for the Greek cause.

Examples of the revival of interest in Greek culture at this time are Keats' Ode to a Grecian

Urn published in 1820 and the design of the British Museum in a Greek Revival idiom.

An extension has been added to the right (looking from the road), probably in the mid 19th century, incorporating as a design element a bay window on the upper floor. A similar detail is found in buildings 9 and 11.

By this time rainwater was channelled off the roof using gutters. Even so you can see on the front facade a decorative brick entablature, a feature initially intended to prevent rainwater running down the brick face of the house. Now that wood was scarcer and bricks used for internal partition walls there is a lower risk of fire. This allowed builders to avoid extending brick walls above the roof line as had been the previous practice.

Note the mansard roof – a roof incorporating a shallow and then a steeper gradient. This device enables the space under the eaves of the roof to be used for accommodation.

The windows have lead flashing. Lead had been used as a roof material even in medieval times principally for churches. But it was expensive and could be afforded only for use in the more prestigious buildings, as for instance in the grand “leaden hall” from which Leadenhall Street in the city of London derives its name.

Next building in walk order : 33.



47 – 49 North Hill

4 : This building is a good example of what is often referred to as “Provincial Georgian” architecture.

The term “provincial” is not pejorative. It is used to describe houses built in a place which did not require buildings to comply with building regulations that were introduced specifically for London houses.

The house was probably built by a speculative developer without the assistance of an architect but using a standard pattern book. It may originally have been built as a single house or perhaps as a pair of unequal sized semi-detached houses. The design is well thought through, not over elaborate and incorporates a standard 1 : 1 ratio between the width of the windows and the intervening walls.

The arrangement of the rooms on different floors reflects the conventions of the time with a dedicated kitchen being situated on a lower ground floor, a day room, dining room and perhaps a study on the upper ground floor, the principal bedroom above and on the top floor space for children and servants.

There is a standard lintel which protects and prevents a view of the roof. The classical urns that decorate the roof are original and reflect the classical allusions (as in Keats’ poem). They would have accorded status to the owners.

Next building in walk order : 5.



Woodland Cottage, 18 North Hill

5 : This small house share similarities with building 2 but there are a number of features which indicate it is likely to be of later construction. For example the sills protrude beyond the brickwork and the roof projects beyond the front wall of the house. This is a

local version of a regency house, very simple and unfussy.

Whereas a medieval roof would have been constructed of thatch, and a Georgian roof of tiles, the arrival of the railways now made North Wales slate a viable alternative as roofing material.

Whereas thatch, which was heavy, porous and had many joints, required the pitch of the roof to be steep enough to ensure rain drained off rather than into the roof, slate, which is a thinner and hence lighter material and has many fewer joints, enabled water to run off more readily into gutters and downpipes. This resulted in roof designs with a much shallower pitch than was normally necessary when using earlier roofing materials.

Next building in walk order : 32.



82 North Hill

6 : This house was probably built in the 18th century. There is a typically Georgian parapet above the roof. Note the smaller windows on the upper floor. Rooms on this floor are likely to have extended into the roof space.

A typical feature of three storey terraced houses of this period is the decorative fanlight above the entrance door. Early fanlights would be made of timber sections, each of which framed a detailed plate of glass. As cast iron replaces wrought iron fanlights become much more elaborate, sometimes forming a feature separated from the glass panel behind.

During this period the front door would not be glazed as it was in the second half of the 19th century (see building 18).

In terms of quality and the status of the people it would have been built to house, this house is of a slightly lower standard than building 2.

Next building in walk order : 10.



115 North Hill

7 : This house is similar to building 6. It has a cast iron fanlight and taller windows on the principal floors. Note that the entire terrace has been designed so that the distances between the windows are consistent both within and between the houses. Its Greek revival details suggest that the entrance surround has been subject to later modification.

The layout of the house is too cramped to allow the front door to be situated directly below the first floor window as would be the normal practice for a house of this sort. The entrance hall has been made narrower than it might otherwise be in order to maximise the width of the downstairs front room.

Next building in walk order : 11.



76-78 North Hill

8 : These houses are the first examples on North Hill of semi detached houses, almost certainly from the Regency period. Perhaps surprisingly in comparison with today's preferences, members of the 18th century's upper classes were content to live in terraced houses. At this time the external face of the house was simple and not yet individualised. Any ostentatious design is reserved for the interior of the house. After a gap of nearly two hundred years this attitude can be seen in the design of building 30.

The emergence of the semi-detached house was a particular feature of the suburb, where land was not as expensive as in the city. The semi detached house provides the benefit of easy access to the garden without the need to walk through the house.

Early examples of semi detached houses such as this were often designed with a side entrance, a practice which tended not to survive into the 20th century when the front entrance to a semi detached house would normally be on the wall facing the street. The growing fashion in mid-Victorian times for side entrances provided an opportunity for the expression of a more individualist style of living.

This house, or pair of houses, is probably the work of a speculative builder who, in Highgate, would not be constrained by the by-laws which governed the construction of central London houses.

Note the low pitch of the slate roof and the protruding gutters typical of its day.

Next building in walk order : 20**3 North Hill**

9 : Charming though its appearance is this house exhibits features from many different periods and styles of domestic architecture. Although Georgian in origin, we can tell from the dimensions of the glass panes on the first floor window that the window is unlikely to be the original Georgian one – its panes would have been much smaller. Likewise the protruding oriel window on the first floor is both too heavy in design and too ornate in detail than a Georgian upper floor window would have been.

The attractive trellis is typical of this period. However this particular one is likely to be a sympathetic replacement for the original which would have been made from wrought iron.

Next building in walk order : 30.**88-90 North Hill**

10 : The style of this building is relatively unusual for Highgate, being more common in west London suburbs such as Hammersmith and Chiswick and in Bristol. Like many regency and early Victorian buildings it is faced with stucco, a form of plaster often applied to bricks whose quality did not allow them to be used as facing bricks.

Stucco was often moulded to give the appearance of stonework. This treatment must have given the house a particularly fashionable appearance when it was first built.

Note the low pitched roof, the high front parapet and the concealed internal arrangements for channelling roof water to ground level.

A distinctive feature of the design of this house is the introduction of the cornice, originally a device used above windows and doors to throw rainwater away from the outer surface of the house. This functional device later became a decorative feature and over time was adopted to an even greater extent inside the house where it became a useful method of concealing joints in the plaster where walls and ceilings meet.

Note also the band of black pitch or tar that has been applied to base of the front wall. The purpose of this treatment is to prevent water splashing against and damaging the stucco. It is a feature commonly found in village houses built of cob. It should not be mistaken for damp proofing, a practice that was not introduced until 1870.

At this point you are at the end of the walk

52 North Hill

11 : This house is a classical example of a suburban Regency villa, thought to date from 1813. It is set further back from the road than earlier houses on North Hill and, like building 10, is faced with stucco.

Note the upstairs bay window, a feature it shares with buildings 3 and 9. There are fewer but larger windows than in North Hill's earlier houses.

The pitch of the roof is very low, as was now possible with the use of slate. Unlike earlier Georgian designs the roof overhangs the front facade.

The inclusion of a veranda in the front elevation is a particular feature of this period. Like the "bungalow" it is an architectural concept imported from British India.

Next building in walk order : 18.



96 North Road

12 : This house is probably mid-Georgian, dating from around 1820. It exemplifies many of the design features which we associate with the style of architecture, named after the renaissance Italian, Andrea Palladio (1508 – 1580).

A key feature of the Palladian style is the visual separation on the vertical dimension of a podium, in this case the stuccoed ground floor, and the pedestal, in this case the brick first and second floors. Likewise the facade expressed the concept of a "giant order" in which the horizontal detail of the first and second floors is vertically consistent, the windows appearing part of a vertical column.

This is the first house in North Hill to feature a balustrade on the roof. Balustrades were a fashionable design feature during this period. It is interesting that on the basis of the totally different design of the windows the house to its right (facing from the road), must have been built much later, despite incorporating a matching balustrade.

This house departs from the convention of older Georgian houses in North Hill in so far as the windows on each floor are no longer of uniform size or design, the windows to the principal rooms being much larger than those giving light to the staircase.

Though the internal layout of this house and its neighbour are probably very similar, the differences in external detail prove a good illustration of differences between Georgian and Victorian attitudes to ornamentation.

The Georgian facade is typically simple, unostentatious and relatively inexpensive to build. This reflects the cultural attitudes of the time and in particular the reaction against the grandiose theatrical ornamentation typical of the Jacobean period which was associated in many people's mind with an over-powerful state.

Next building in walk order : 26.



Morven House, 6 North Hill

13 : This house, Morven House, has been badly neglected during the period of its use by Haringey as sheltered accommodation for homeless people and drug addicts. It is difficult to date but is likely to have been built in the early 19th century.

Note the Palladian influences, in particular the incisions to the stucco plasterwork on the lower floor plinth, which visually distinguishes it from the pediment of the first and second floors. The incisions in the plasterwork are intended to give the appearance of stone. Morven House is the first house in North Hill, but not the last, to display this design feature. Note also the “giant order” whereby the windows, at least on the main part of the house and in the left (facing from the road) wing are vertically symmetrical.

The semi-circular top to the windows on the ground floor, which help to distinguish the podium from the pediment, is a design feature not evident in earlier Georgian houses in North Hill. A more traditional feature is the very heavy horizontal entablature which throws water away from the walls facing the street. Note the imposing parapet which hides the roof.

The railings in front of the windows on the first floor are in cast iron and are typical of the period. Balconies of this period are decorative. They are not designed for catching the sun. The grand front entrance door incorporates elements such as Doric pillars associated with the revival of interest in the architecture of ancient Greece.

Next building in walk order : 27.

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Laurel House, 61 North Hill

14 : Though its outward appearance is very different to that of Morven House, this house, which is just a little later, exhibits many common design features. It is faced in stucco, some of which is rendered in such a way as to give the appearance of stone. It incorporates a very heavy horizontal entablature.

The patterned rendering on each corner of the house is designed to emulate stonework which, in houses of this style, would give added strength of the corners of the house. These are known as quoins and are a feature of renaissance houses. You will see similar treatment on the facade of Kenwood House.

By contrast with building 13, Morven House, there is no longer evidence of a “giant order”. Indeed it is the ground and first floor which appear a unified whole rather than the first and second.

Many of the decorative features of this house would have been bought directly from builders’ merchants of the day, which made external decoration easier, cheaper and more varied. The panes of glass in the windows are now much larger, reflecting improvements in the processes for manufacturing glass. The larger triptych type windows have a design from which it is easy to see the classic Victorian bay window emerging.

This house is much more fanciful and individualistic than its Georgian near neighbours, almost romantic but not over-bearing to a modern eye. Note the strong decorative strip below the roof and the brackets that support the guttering.

Next building in walk order : 15.



Verandah Cottages, 63 North Hill

15 : This building is the first in North Hill to have been designed as flats for separate occupation and the first to have been built by a charity for renting out to people with lower incomes. It was constructed in 1863.

The flats are very small indeed but unlike the situation in later flats, such as in building 25, each dwelling has its own entrance and can be reached via an external rather than an internal staircase. The access to each flat via an external walkway is now referred to as “deck access”.

This design is the forerunner of a style of local authority building particularly common during the post war expansion of public sector housing. It is a style peculiar to England. In Scotland and continental Europe access to each flat is more likely to be via an internal staircase, as for instance in the 1930s block opposite, building 25.

The design may have been influenced by standards made mandatory in the 1870s by-laws requiring each dwelling to have its own internal access to a water point.

Next building in walk order : 31.



4 North Hill

16 : This house is the first one in North Hill to be constructed in a Gothic Revival style. More particularly it is a good example of Venetian Gothic, more medieval in style than the Gothic style from Florence or Rome, more suited to a colder climate with a steeper roof and smaller windows.

Note for the first time the appearance in North Hill of the pointed arch and the use of bricks of different colours to provide interesting and rather beautiful patterns in the exterior wall. The pointed arches are distinctively Venetian in having a sharp junction between the vertical and the curved sections as well as at the top of the arch.

Despite these innovations we continue to see the heavy use of entablature to throw water from the wall and, at least on one section of the house, a pediment to conceal the roof. The strong contrast between the two sections of the roof suggests that they may have been constructed at different times.

Next building in walk order : 29.



Springfield Cottages, 169-175 North Hill

17 :Springfield Cottages conveniently record the date of their construction, 1877, on a bold plaque between the cottages. Like building 15 they were erected by a charity.

By now we are beginning to see the influence of the 1870 building by-laws, a system of building control which set out certain national minimum standards which local communities could extend and amend should they so wish.

Features of these by-laws which can be seen on these cottages are the vertical brickwork between the dwellings, designed again to reduce the risk of fire spreading from house to house; the generous space; the taller chimneys; the 9 inch minimum brickwork for each wall and the two courses of blue brick at the base of the building to control against damp.

Under these regulations each living room would require an area of window equal to one tenth of the area of each room and ventilation equal to one twentieth. Note therefore the introduction of the bay window to help achieve the first requirement and of the sash window to help achieve the second one. The glazing of these windows is distinctively Victorian with the panes in the centre of the window being larger in size than those around the edge.

Where these cottages have bay windows their Georgian predecessors would have been built with bow (round) windows. But by contrast with most Victorian terraced houses the bay window is restricted to the front room on the ground floor.

As with building 18 Springfield Cottages are likely to have been built from pre-fabricated components bought from local builders merchants, a good example of which is the Greek Revival style pillared porch.

Next building in walk order : 8.



121 North Hill

18 : This villa in self consciously riotous Gothic Revival style dates from around 1880. Its extravagant use of fanciful detail approaches but just manages not to cross the line into tastelessness, at least to our minds.

Bay windows have here extended themselves into bay room ends giving much more sumptuous and interesting interior rooms. The sheets of glass are much larger, allowing the rooms to be lighter. Perhaps unusually for a Gothic Revival house the builder has retained a symmetrical design. The entrance door is recessed and a much less prominent element than in earlier dwellings in North Hill.

Note an interesting development, the first chronological appearance of glazed panels in the front door.

This house shares with building 16 the use of different coloured brick to give interest, in this case above the entrance door and the distinctive treatment given to the key stones above each bay window. Note the much more complicated set of roof sections required to protect the bays to the front of the house.

A frieze about the upper windows has replaced the entablature.

This house illustrates for the first time in North Hill the use of an artificial aggregate, coade stone, in the sills below the windows, which are much more extensive than in earlier dwellings in North Hill. This aggregate was devised and manufactured by a Mrs Coade, and was extensively used in London in the last decades of the 19th century. Apparently the

secret formula for its construction was taken by Mrs Coade to her grave.

Next building in walk order : 24.



99 North Hill

19 : It was not until 1900 that local authorities were permitted to build social housing. This house is one of a number which were built around 1902 by Hornsey Borough Council in the “Kenwood” estate. They are the earliest buildings in North Hill to be constructed by a local authority. An important objective for developments of this sort was to improve sanitation and hence to reduce the spread of infectious diseases.

The house is based on a standard design which would be have been extensively used by different local councils but which could be supplemented by additional design details. The front entrance is one of the first in North Hill to have a glazed panel to the side of the front door as well as above it.

Other design innovations characteristics of this period include a “string course”, a horizontal band of decorative bricks; the decorative curvature to the brick design below the windows; and a very faint brick arch above the windows and door.

It would be common in this period for a new house to contain a bay window if it were built for rent by a private landlord. For some reason

it is very uncommon for a bay window to be included in the designs used in public housing.

Next building in walk order : 6.



80 North Hill

20 : This house is classic example of a style of housing which was particular popular in London’s Edwardian suburbs but somewhat surprising is the only example of its sort on Highgate North Hill.

Dating from with a year or two of 1905 it contains many distinctive features of the Edwardian terraced house, a recessed entrance door below an upstairs window, a trapezoid rather than a rectangular bay window end, heavy sills below the windows supported by elaborate brick brackets. The elaborate plaster head to the vertical pillars either side of the windows and door are typical of the type of product that would have been stock by builders’ merchants of that period.

Above the upstairs bay we see hints of design features which become more popular during the inter war period, the small areas of “pebble dash” rendering in the gable and the use vertical wooden boards, reminiscent of the Tudor period, as a decorative feature on the gable end.

The elaborate ornamentation in some of the design details owes its existence to the

influence of the Arts and Crafts movement. It was not uncommon at that period for much of this detailing to have been hand-crafted.

Next building in walk order : 19.



86 North Road

21 : This house is one of a terrace of similar houses dating from the Edwardian period. Like buildings 20 and 23 it would almost certainly have been constructed for private renting. Like building 23 the house incorporates decorative ridge tiles.

In common with building 20 these houses are designed with a recessed front door entrance. However for the first time in North Hill and the porches are faced with ceramic wall tiles and the front door incorporates decorative coloured glass.

These are houses with pleasant proportions with large windows. The link between the upstairs bay and the eaves makes a pleasant feature as do the brackets supporting the plinth protecting the entrance from rain and the overhanging brickwork separating the roof from that of adjoining houses.

Next building in walk order : 12.



Rowlands Close, North Hill

22 : This building dates from the late 1920s, a period of reaction against the elaborate detailing of the Victorian and Edwardian periods and one in which blocks of flats were often built to create monumental effect.

This monumentalism is evident in the rather heavy design of the central section of this block of flats, which is picked out in white rendering.

The design, like many others of that period, emphasises the horizontal at the expense of the vertical. The banding which separates the top floor from one the ones below is the reverse of the typical Georgian design, as for instance in buildings 12 and 13, which have the effect separating the lowest floor (the podium) from upper floors. This reversal we also see in building 28.

The iron balconies may reflect the importance attached to fresh air and exposure to the sun which was common in the 1920s and 1930s although it is also possible that these were intended to facilitate evacuation in the event of fire.

Next building in walk order : 23.



95-97 North Hill

23 : These two houses date from around 1910. They were probably built for private renting, not by Hornsey Council as council housing. This is straightforward by-law housing. The windows are large in relation to the size of the house. The decorative plasterwork on the right house is almost certainly a more recent addition.

These are one of two sets of houses in North Hill to incorporate ridge tiles. Similar tiles are used in building 21. The tiles are apparently merely decorative.

Next building in walk order :25.



56b North Hill

24 : This pair of semi detached houses was built in 1928 on the site of a former public house.

Unlike other pairs of semi detached houses in North Hill, such as buildings 8 and 32, this pair has not been designed to look as though it

is a single dwelling – each house has its separate roof.

This is the first building in North Hill to use clay pantiles for vertical cladding. This is also the first dwelling to be faced in rough rendering. The rendered surfaces in buildings 10 and 13 have a smooth finish.

Another innovation is that glazing is now applied across the entirety of the front wall, the pillars that support the upper storey being concealed internally. This may reflect the growing wish for light and airy accommodation.

The house illustrates changes in the attitude towards panes of glass. Whereas North Hill's earlier dwellings contain glass panels as large as it was cost effective to manufacture, this house starts a trend for windows to contain a larger number of smaller glass panes.

The use of waterproof felt enables the builder to incorporate a projecting lower storey with a flat roof.

Next building in walk order : 2.



Highcroft

25 : This four storey building is the first block of private leasehold flats to have been built on North Hill. It was developed during the 1920s, a period it became more common for the larger population of older people to live in separate accommodation from their grown up children.

As a result of the millions of men lost during the First World War the population contained a large number of single young women, many

of whom went to work. These factors combined to cause an increase in the demand for smaller dwelling units and ones which were easy to run.

Increases in the price of land, especially in sought after neighbourhoods such as Highgate, made it more difficult for developers to realise a profit from the construction of single family houses. However whilst the English middle classes were capable of adapting to life in flats, at this time they still preferred to live in low rise rather than high rise blocks.

The style of this period shows a reaction against the over-elaboration of Victorian domestic architecture. A popular design theme was that of “streamlining”. So too was the emphasis of horizontality. Belief in the therapeutic value of fresh air and sun-bathing resulted in the first examples in North Hill of dwellings with their own balconies. These are also the first dwellings in North Hill to feature metal window frames which, because the divide between panes was thinner, allowed more sunlight into the living room.

By contrast with building 15, these flats share a common main entrance, serviced by a concierge. They are the first in North Hill to feature an electric lift to the upper floors. The leases of these flats included the provision of a standing charge to pay the cost of shared services such as cleaning and garden maintenance.

Despite the new emphasis on the horizontal there is a harmonious balance between vertical and horizontal design features.

Next building in walk order : 34



Highpoint, 1 North Hill

26 : Situated where North Road seamlessly becomes North Hill, the two residential buildings of Highpoint stand as icons of the architectural philosophy known as International Modernism.

They are listed Grade 1, and were designed by Berthold Lubetkin and Tecton.

Pioneering in its day, both in terms of how to live in a new way, and how to build for a new, and better world, Highpoint I (1935) in particular remains a symbol of the energy and hope that spread throughout Europe between the wars. It was built to provide rented homes for the management staff of the Gestetner duplicator factory in Tottenham.

Highpoint 2 (1938) was built on the site of the house next door (in the teeth of local Highgate opposition to such tall buildings in a ‘residential area’), and contains more spacious duplex flats. The penthouse remains the highest residence in London, and the views over the city are wonderful.

The Caryatids supporting the entrance canopy are copies from the Erechthion in Greece and were intended as a sop to the demand for a more historical style. They were the source of much controversy at the time, both in architectural purist circles and in the press.

The six-foot gap between the two buildings represents the philosophical gap between building for different social groups, but the whole composition showed just how beautiful public housing could be when harmony between landscape and building are understood. Tecton went on to build several social housing estates, in Paddington and opposite Sadlers Wells in Islington.

The Highpoint buildings still show how things both could and should be done. With the landscaped private gardens at the back, which include a swimming pool and tennis courts, the solution to the use of land is both economic and elegant. Le Corbusier visited and liked it.

Next building in walk order : 16.



Broadlands

27 : This block of flats dates from around 1930. Its design introduces to North Hill a number of design features characteristic of the Art Deco movement. Examples are the diagonal glazing on the entrance doors and the curved metal windows.

By contrast with the asymmetry of many Victorian designs, this block is self consciously symmetrical. As with buildings 22 and 28 the design incorporates horizontal banding but this is delicately picked out and balanced by the very strong vertical element above the entrance door.

Next building in walk order : 1.



North Hill Court, North Hill

The Highgate Society

28 : This block of flats also dates from the 1930s and, like building 27, it incorporates many features characteristic of the Art Deco movement.

As with building 27 there is a strong vertical design feature above the entrance door, including for the first time vertical brickwork, but this is interrupted by a perhaps overly strong white horizontal banding which separates the top floor from the rest of the block. Palladio is unlikely to have approved of the arrangement of the entrance doors which are situated at a level midway between the floor levels of the ground floor and first floor flats.

Next building in walk order : 13.



Montgomery House, Hillcrest Estate

29 : This block, Montgomery House, is one of a number designed by Sir Thomas Bennett for Hornsey Borough Council and erected just after the end of the Second World War. The name of each block commemorates a military leader in the Second World War.

Though the blocks were built by Hornsey Borough Council, the design is based on a standard template used by the London County Council in its pre war construction. With its

concrete frame and simple brick detailing the building conveys a sense of municipal standardisation and responsibility.

In common with the flats in the private block, building 25, most flats have access to private balconies, though these north facing ones are perhaps more likely to be used for storage than for sun-bathing. In common with building 28 the entrance door is situated at mezzanine level, a practice which was subsequently discontinued.

Next building in walk order : 9.



9 North Hill

30 : Here is an early example of modern design, unusually for North Hill carefully concealed behind garages. It was probably built during the 1960s using materials typical of that period. The solid wooden panels that face the garage are a typically modern design feature and the deliberate simplicity of the design, the absence of detail and the low profile of the house contrast with the grander statements made by almost every other house in North Hill.

This is the earliest example in North Hill of a house built around a concrete frame.

Next building in walk order : 28.



Bramalea Close

31 : Bramalea Close introduces a number of novel design features to North Hill. This is the first time dwellings have been designed around a close, accessed from a thoroughfare running off North Hill.

These are the first houses to use painted brickwork as well as to combine use of white painted brick and the contrasting darker wood facing. The use of cobbles and traditional building materials convey the atmosphere of a small market town or port which contrasts with the use of interior space which is much more modern. These are the first dwellings in North Hill to contain an integral garage.

The design reduces garden space to a modest patio but extends interior space by adding a third storey. The introduction of a skylight in the roof and of powered ventilation enables bathrooms to be situated in the middle of the house, adjacent to a central staircase, leaving living rooms and bedrooms to maximise the use of the front and rear aspects.

Next building in walk order : 22.



59 North Hill

32 : Though this pair of semi-detached houses was built some twenty or thirty years after buildings 30 and 31 their design is much more traditional and is not at all self-consciously modern.

Just as the semi detached dwellings in buildings 8 and 10 the two individual dwellings have been designed as mirror images.

For the first time in North Hill security gates are integrated to the design, keeping unwanted visitors out rather than encouraging wanted visitors in. Innovation is concentrated on interior features, such sophisticated security, sound and media systems, rather than on the exterior of the building.

Though there are many elements of Georgian revivalism in the facade, the lack of vertical consistency to the overall design and the bleak austerity of the entrance would not have been appreciated by a builder of houses in Georgian times.

Next building in walk order : 14.



26 North Hill

33 : This terrace was built at the same time as building 32. It shares many design features, particularly the detailing immediately below the roof-line.

Perhaps for the first time a building in North Hill has been designed to harmonise with the style of an older, neighbouring terrace rather than to contribute a distinctive design statement. In this respect the design works well. Note how advances in technology make

it possible to introduce more wood to the door and the windows without fear of rot.

Next building in walk order : 4.



Wetherley Court, North Hill

34 : This building consists of three three storey houses, each with their own separate entrance. They were built contemporaneously with buildings 32 and 33. As perhaps with building 33 it is consciously attempting to achieve consistency with other buildings in the street, perhaps anticipating the style that would be considered acceptable by Haringey planners.

As with a number of other North Hill houses from diverse periods the building is designed symmetrically, almost as though it were a single house. The fact that internally the building is divided into separate dwellings is not necessarily evident from the facade as would have been the case in Georgian times.

Though it is not evident from the outside this building and building 32 establish an important innovation in North Road, the incorporation of spacious basements, designed to maximise interior space within a limited footprint and limited height.

Next building in walk order : 7.

Further information:

This guide is based on the information contained in a guided walk undertaken for the Highgate Society by Wilson Briscoe. Without his expert knowledge it would not have been possible to produce the guide.

This and other sections of the Northern Heights Circuit can be downloaded from the website of the Highgate Society.

www.highgatesociety.com

More detailed information about Hampstead and Highgate can be found in:

Denford, Stephen, *The Hampstead Book – The A-Z of its history and people*, 2009

Farmer, Alan, *Hampstead Heath*, 1984

McDowall, David, and Wolton, Deborah, *The walkers guide to Hampstead Heath*, 2006

Richardson, John, *Highgate : Its history since the 15th century*, 1983

Schwitzer, Joan, *Highgate Walks*, 2004

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