

Hampstead: Lanes, Alleyways, Historic Houses, Quaint Boutiques

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“A large collection of roads and passages which don't go in straight lines, houses of different ages, many of them good architecture but more often it's just the way they fit together, full of nice vistas and surprises. Hampstead is a huge collection of twists and turns”.

That's how Mark Pevsner, the grandson of Sir Nicholas Pevsner, a German-born British scholar of the history of architecture described Hampstead, one of London's most expensive suburbs whose mansions sell for over twenty million pounds.

The northern suburb is easily reached by underground – Hampstead is in fact the deepest station on the underground network. Visitors can stroll down the quaint lanes and alleyways with numerous historic houses,

some reincarnated as museums. There are also plenty of designer boutiques and cafes serving home-made delicacies.

The first stop on a walking tour of Hampstead, well signposted when coming out of the tube station, is Burgh House. Hampstead's colourful history is traced back to prehistoric times and is told in the Hampstead Museum on the first floor. The museum's collection includes original works by famous artists such as Helen Allingham, George Charlton, CRW





Cannon Place

Nevinson and Donald Towner. Other highlights include samples of Marcel Breuer's Isokon furniture, the Mayor of Hampstead's chair, the flag of the first scout troop in the country - and a plaster penguin signed by famous authors in 1960!

Although early records of Hampstead can be found in a grant from King Ethelred the Unready to the monastery of St. Peter's at Westminster (AD 986) and it is referred to in the Domesday Book (1086), the

history of Hampstead is generally traced back to the 17th century and the days of the famous spa.

The medical qualities of the chalybeate waters (water impregnated with iron) were widely advertised in the 1700s. Although Hampstead Wells was initially most successful and fashionable, its popularity declined in the 1800s due to competition with other fashionable London spas. The spa was demolished in 1882, although a water fountain, still

standing in Well Walk street near Burgh House, was left behind. An inscription tells us that six acres of land were dedicated to the poor. Little remains of the famous spa, its buildings were damaged during the war and subsequently replaced with flats.

Hampstead started to expand following the opening of the North London Railway in the 1860s (now London overground). Further expansion took place after the Charing Cross, Euston & Hampstead Railway opened in

1907 (now part of London underground's northern line).

Well Walk is the street for historic houses. Veteran family planning campaigner Marie Stope's lived here and so did Constable, the British landscape painter whose scenes of Hampstead's parks, ponds and scenery are among his most famous works.

Turn off Well Walk into Camden Lane and you come to the Lock Up used as a prison cell from 1730 – 1832. Prisoners were held here prior to appearing

Christchurch





before magistrates at No 14 Cannon Place, which takes its name from cannons which line the road – decorative recycling at its best!

Christchurch, dating back to 1852 is a spiritual beacon with a tall spire visible for miles around. It is a church of the old village of Hampstead and the heath. If you're in a hurry to continue shopping take the secret passage, Stamford close, back to Hampstead High Street or continue to the New End Theatre. The building housing

the theatre was constructed in 1890 as the mortuary of the former New End Hospital. A tunnel connecting to the mortuary allowed bodies to be transported under the road. The theatre is said to be haunted. It was opened in 1974 and soon formed its reputation for presenting new writing. Early productions included the world premiere of Jean Anouilh's *You Were So Sweet When You were Little*. The hospital was converted into flats by Kendall and Young in 1985.

Take a well earned rest in Hampstead Grove. There is a milestone in the bushes next to Whitestone pond, a shadow of its former self when children used is a bathing hole.

Fenton House in Hampstead Grove, a 17th century merchant's house, is a must-see. One of the earliest and largest houses in Hampstead it is architecturally outstanding, although the architect and even the name of the family for whom it was built are lost.

It is now best known for its collection of early keyboard instruments but it also houses porcelain needlework, paintings and other collections.

The house sits in a garden which seems hardly to have changed in 300 years. Wrought iron gates mark the southern entrance. To the north, terraced walks around a formal lawn and rose garden lead to the apple orchard and kitchen garden.

Landscape painter Constable surfaces again at No 2 Lower





Terrace where he lodged in 1821 and 1822 just before Admiral's House which was built during the reign of George III and occupied by an eccentric former naval officer called Fountain North. He constructed two decks on the roof, a main deck and a quarter deck, and mounted cannons all round them from which he fired salutes on the King's birthday and to celebrate naval victories. His cabin, built like the stern of a ship, was high up in the air.

There was an acre of garden, since built upon. Through the garden ran a tunnel which was said to communicate with the Heath, and was alleged the escape-way of Dick Turpin. The house currently carries a brown plaque stating '*Sir George Gilbert Scott 1811 - 1878 Architect lived here*'

After passing some gothic revival houses, now the entrance to an old people's home and seeing the London Eye the walk can end from where it began at

Burgh House. There are mouth watering cream teas in the buttery café and souvenir cards. Not far from Hampstead is the historic Highgate cemetery where philosophers, poets and political activists from all four corners of the world are buried, among them Karl Marx whose bust looks down on visitors like a compassionate father figure. Engraved on the tombstone is his famous observation that philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways – the point however is to change it.

There are known to be at least 850 notable people buried at Highgate, about two thirds of whom appear in the Dictionary of National Biography and most of the others in either Modern English Biography, Who Was Who, in the obituary notices in the Press, or in Graves "Dictionary of Exhibitors at the Royal Academy 1796-1906". Amongst these are 18 Royal Academicians, 6 Lord Mayors of London, 48 Fellows of the Royal Society, the founders of London businesses including Maples, Foyles, Negretti-Zambra, John

Milestone



Admiral's House



Lobb, P&O, and Quaritch, and names such as Faraday, George Eliot, Radclyffe Hall, Carl Rosa and Sir Ralph Richardson. The cemetery has been transformed from a typical neatly laid out burial ground into a natural, woodland park officially designated as Grade II by English Heritage. This gives it a special beauty and charm. There is a set programme for the maintenance of the landscape and for the improvement of access. Over the years there has been copious planting including upwards of 100 different species of wildflowers and countless trees including hornbeam, exotic limes, oak, hazel, sweet chestnut, tulip and field maple. Some 50 species of birds and 18 species of butterfly have been sighted; among the spiders were three rarely seen in the UK; and there is even a resident colony of foxes. Friends of Highgate Cemetery organize regular landscape working parties so the public can become directly involved in preserving London's heritage which is showcased as its best in both Hampstead and Highgate.