

A Walk from Blackstock Road to Green Lanes

This walk takes us through Islington's eastern borderlands, along the frontier with Hackney. It continues Andrew Clayton's series based on the updated register of Islington's Locally Listed Buildings, recently completed by a group of volunteers though not yet approved by the council.

We start from Finsbury Park, along Blackstock Road towards Highbury. On the right is one of Islington's London Board Schools, Ambler Road School. This displays the Queen Anne Baroque architectural style used by TJ Bailey and his colleagues at the School Board at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Their style was deliberately secular, not "churchy", to mark the break from the religious and charitable foundations which dominated London schools before the Education Act of 1870. This school is comparatively plain, but given distinction by its central tower and turret, and by the stone tablet with its name and date facing Blackstock Road.

Continuing south you come on the right to one of the many shopfronts locally listed by Islington in 1993. No. 132 is now a bar and music venue but it still has its T Bird fascia from its days as a clothes shop, selling children's items, ladies' underwear and hosiery. The T-Bird bar is known for the times the young Ed Sheeran did acoustic sessions in the downstairs bar.

The road curves slightly to the right and on the left is one of Islington's finest police stations. It has an attractive almost domestic front, designed in 1903 by John Dixon Butler. He also built police stations in Hornsey, Muswell Hill, Tottenham and elsewhere in north and east London. The police moved out in 2012 and it has been converted into flats. The late 1800s and early 1900s were a time of rapid expansion of police stations, particularly in London. The architectural style followed was strongly influenced by Richard Norman Shaw and New Scotland Yard, and Highbury Vale police station is no exception. It is a high-quality building, with excellent materials, combining Baroque (doorway and gable end) and Arts & Crafts (windows and cast-iron railings).



Highbury Vale Police Station

No. 217 is a former fire station, now converted into a day nursery and flats upstairs. It is similar to the converted fire station in Mayton Street, off Seven Sisters Road, also locally listed. Both are Edwardian Arts & Crafts in style, with office and residential space above the ground floor fire station. So, this part of Blackstock Road gives us three examples of late Victorian or Edwardian Baroque and

Arts & Crafts public buildings. They are historically important as a group, showing how public buildings were developing a less forbidding face at the turn of the century.

Keep walking towards Highbury and up the slight curve to the right where Blackstock Road becomes Highbury Park. On the left is St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church, one of the few 20th century modernist buildings on the local list. It was designed by Stanley C Kerr Bate in 1960 – 62, together with the adjoining school, the presbytery and offices. He described the style himself as "modernised Gothic" and that is the impression it gives. The pitched roof and the buttresses make its outline almost triangular, with a central window which nods towards the Perpendicular style of late medieval English churches. The tower too has a medieval air with its steeple echoing the Rhenish church building style. The overall effect is entirely modern and reflects the architect's own words about the building. He said he wanted to build a "happy church"

Turn left down Kelross Road, right onto Aberdeen Road, left onto Highbury Grange and left again onto Balfour Road, developed in 1873-5. Tucked away on the left, as Balfour Road turns at a right angle, is Louise Villa. Its builder has embellished every feature, with prominent brackets under overhanging eaves, tripartite windows on both floors and cast-iron decorative railings on the first-floor sills. The ground floor windows are pilastered with stiff leaf capitals and cornice above. The front doorway is also pilastered and its leaded fanlight retains the name "Louise Villa". It makes a complete contrast to the rest of the street; sometimes the builder, sub-contracted by the developer, built the nicest house for himself.



85 Balfour Road, "Louise Villa"

Turning your back on Louise Villa you see at the end of the road the elevation of one of the striking mansions on Highbury New Park. The locally listed Nos. 120-126, of around 1860, are formed of two pairs of semi-detached 'Gothic' style villas. Highbury New Park was developed from 1851 by Henry Rydon and his architect Charles Hambridge as an "extensive suburb for the middle classes". They used a variety of styles ranging from Greek revival, through Italianate and Lombardic, to Gothic. A blue plaque marks the residence, from 1898-1939, of David Gestetner, developer of office copying machinery. This was one of the great breakthrough inventions of the late 19th century. Instead of laboriously copying by hand a skilled clerk could turn out a precise copy every ten seconds. Gestetner made his machines in Cross Street Islington until 1907, when he moved the business to Tottenham Hale. It survived until the 1980s.



120 Highbury New Park

Our next stop is St. Augustine's Church, a mix of the Early English and Decorated styles, of London stock brick, with some polychromatic work and stone dressings. A tower with twinned lancets projects forward on the southwest corner. The west end contains two large pointed windows, with geometric tracery surmounted by a rose window. By the 1860s some eighty houses had been completed by Rydon and the residents needed somewhere to worship. A 'tin tabernacle' was erected in 1864, seating 850, to serve the estate's spiritual needs. This was replaced by the permanent church, St. Augustine's, in 1869-70, seating 1,150 and costing £10,000, paid for by Rydon himself.

Turn left onto St. Augustine's Path to Petherton Road and then left again. At the junction with Green Lanes turn left until you reach Nos. 169-171. These are a pair of very substantial villas, palatial in their scale. They appear on a map of 1868, when large areas of Stoke Newington were yet to be built up, reminders of a time when the area around Newington Green was a good deal posher than it is now.



169-171 Green Lanes

Return to Petherton Road and walk along the left-hand side to Leconfield Road, laid out and built in the 1870s. These terraces have two stories and semi-basements, but if you walk along to No. 62 you come to another small detached villa, slightly below street level. The four rusticated pilasters on its frontage add a Baroque touch to the facade which increases the impact of its design. This is an unusual building for this part of Highbury, again perhaps earmarked by the builder for his own use.



The Leconfield

Retrace your steps again to Green Lanes and The Leconfield, the former Royal Oak. A pub has stood on this site since at least 1848 but the current building dates from 1926 in a Tudor revival style popular among brewers at the time. It retains some fine original features including the golden 'Courage's' cockerel above the pub sign at the front of the building, and a tiled 'Courage's' sign on the Leconfield Road side. It also has unusual beaten lead panels on the first and second floor bays above the two front entrances. It is a congenial place to end this walk along the eastern edge of the borough.