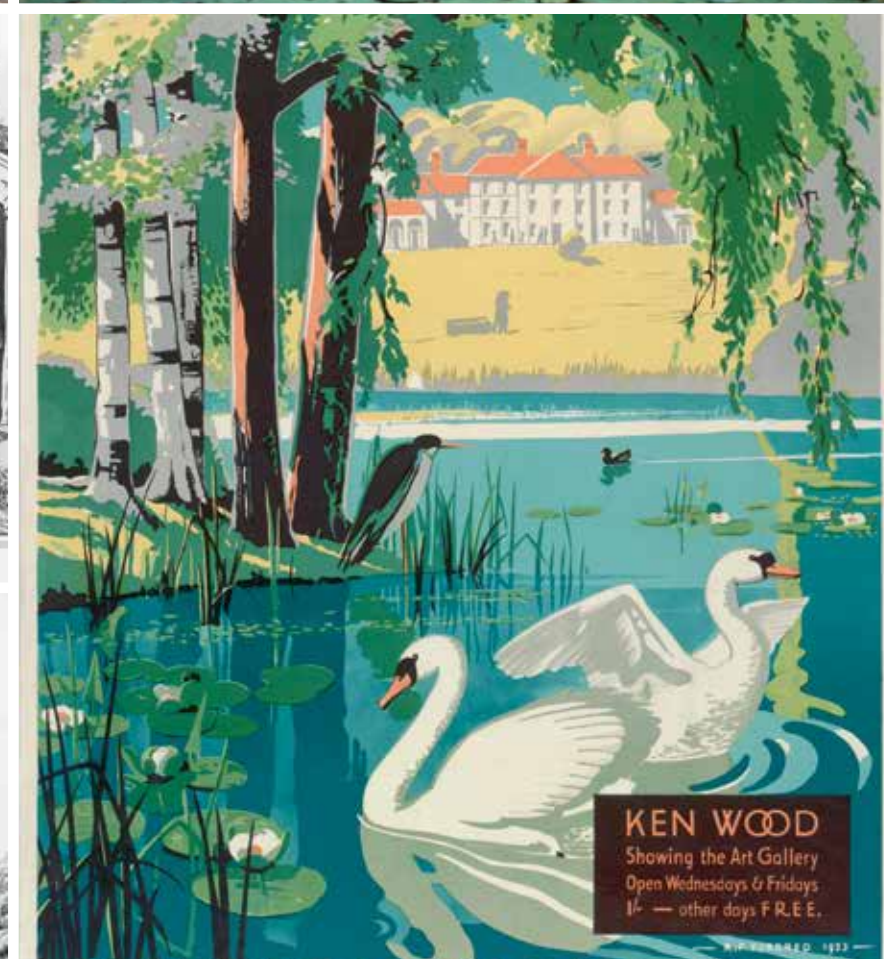


Bohemian paradise

From John Keats to Dame Judi Dench—Hampstead has long been the home of Britain's best, with good reason, discovers Carla Passino



DICK TURPIN *Clearing the Old Hounsey toll bar GATE.*
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HAMPSTEAD HEATH & PARLIAMENT HILL



NW3 LITTLE BLACK BOOK

► **The Hampstead Butcher & Providore**

Meat is front and centre at this shop, which holds butchery and sausage-making classes, but the deli counter is well stocked with cheeses, olives and oven-ready dishes, too (56, Rossllyn Hill, NW3)

► **Maud & Mabel**

This idiosyncratic shop stocks ceramics, clothing, woodwork and jewellery that share a pure, pared-down aesthetic inspired by Japanese design (10, Perrin's Court, NW3)

► **Catto Gallery**

Specialising in contemporary art, Catto features works by many leading artists, but also carries a selection of emerging talent for those who prefer the thrill of a new discovery (100, Heath Street, NW3)

IT'S hard to keep up with Hampstead and not only because the climb up the hill is challenging on the legs. Every cottage-lined lane, every vine-festooned street reads like a *Who's Who* of the past two centuries, with so many blue plaques that your head has to swivel fast from side to side to take them all in.

Surprisingly, the village stayed out of the limelight for centuries, a haven for people who found it hard to settle elsewhere—Quakers or Protestant Dissenters. Interest in the area only picked up in the 18th century, when the healing properties of its iron-rich waters, 'being equal in virtue with Tunbridge Wells', as noted in a newspaper of the time, turned Hampstead into a spa town. It never became as fashionable as Bath because 'it was a little too seedy,' points out Mark Francis of local-history museum Burgh House.

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Nonetheless, the lure of the waters provided brisk enough business to make Hampstead a favourite with highwaymen (including, according to local lore, Dick Turpin himself) and to enrich the spa's chief doctor, William Gibbons, who, in 1720, bought a pretty Queen Anne property—Burgh House.

From its panoramic spot in New End Square, the Grade I-listed building has witnessed first hand Hampstead's rise to its position as one of London's

most sought-after neighbourhoods. Today, the house is a local institution, at whose cafe you may spot Emma Thompson or Helena Bonham Carter.

One of Burgh's residents was upholsterer Israel Lewis, who sent fruit to John Keats's ailing brother, Tom, earning the poet's gratitude. The impoverished siblings had moved to Hampstead in 1817 and the village would quickly become the backdrop for Keats's greatest achievements. It was here that he met his beloved Fanny Brawne, composed *La Belle Dame sans Merci* and wrote *Ode to a Nightingale*.

Wandering around the village, Keats may have met another early Hampstead denizen, John Constable, who first rented a property there in 1819. The Romantic artist painted many views of the heath and, although he would now struggle to recognise the London skyline, the high banks, thick trees and grassy expanses crowned by distant belfries that feature in much of his work have remained almost intact.

Equally well preserved is Admiral's House, in Admiral's Walk, a white confection topped by a quarterdeck-like roof and a flagpole, which Constable painted in *The Grove, Hampstead*. The property had once belonged to a Navy lieutenant, Fountain North, who, as well as giving it a naval makeover, had the habit of firing a cannon to mark important events. The memory of his antics survived long enough that it inspired P. L. Travers to create Admiral Boom's character in her 'Mary Poppins' books.

It's a short walk from Constable's house, in Well Walk, to his resting place outside the church of St John-at-Hampstead, but the route takes in some of the village's prettiest streets, including Flask Walk, with its brick cottages, crooked chimneys and tiny shops full ►



St Paul's may no longer stand alone, but Constable's *View of London, with Sir Richard Steele's House, Hampstead*, is still recognisable

of antiques, ceramics or whimsical flower arrangements, and Church Row, a matronly procession of Georgian townhouses.

At the end of the road stands St John and its two atmospheric graveyards. Their weathered tombstones commemorate Constable, clock-maker John Harrison, cook-book author Eliza Acton and *Punch* cartoonist George Du Maurier.

But it was in the first half of the 20th century—after the railway turned the village into the place where the East End came to party and the Tube became an integral part of London—that the creative set really

'Once a place of refuge, it has a history of being tolerant. People accept people for who they are'

poured in, from Edward Elgar and Agatha Christie to Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius and Sigmund Freud, fleeing persecution from Nazi-occupied Europe.

Slices of local life crop up in many works, from the spies who lived at the stark-lined Isokon Building in Lawn Road, who provided

fodder for Agatha Christie's novels, to the (possibly apocryphal) story that Ian Fleming named James Bond's arch-villain after Ernö Goldfinger because he detested the Modernist building—almost brutal in its boxy simplicity—that the Hungarian-born architect had designed at 2, Willow Road. (The notoriously bad-tempered Goldfinger took issue with the naming and threatened to sue Fleming.)

Over the years, many local luminaries became extremely successful, but remained fiercely loyal to the village and 'that's how Hampstead went from bohemian to super-rich,' explains Mr Francis. 'Judi Dench is a prime example: she moved in, a struggling actress. Twenty years later, she was incredibly wealthy and influential.'

This combination of prosperity and liberal values is what makes Hampstead different from other parts of London. 'Yes, it's probably as expensive as Kensington now, but it still has that fighting spirit about it,' says Mr Francis. 'There are no glamorous outfits and fur coats here—it's more cagoule and wellies.'

After all, he says, 'this was a place of refuge for people. It has a history of being tolerant. People accept people for who they are. That's the big thing that has made Hampstead what it is.'

THE UPS AND DOWN

- Residents love Hampstead Heath—as Dairin Moukarzel of Savills Hampstead explains: 'It's a readymade play spot for the weekends.' Plus, adds Lee Koffman of UK Sotheby's International Realty, the heath is one of the few places in London where you can breathe clean air and swim outdoors
- Residents like the local pubs, with favourites ranging from the Holly Bush—going as strong today as it did in the 18th century—to 28 Church Row (both recommended by Charlie Smith of London Real Estate Advisors), The Freemasons Arms and the dog-friendly The Wells (Mrs Moukarzel's favourites), Villa Bianca and The Coffee Cup (suggested by Mr Schneiderman) and the Duke of Hamilton
- Residents could do without the Northern Line—it's called Misery Line for a reason. That said, Hampstead Heath station has the swanky Overground

Alamy; Getty; Septia Times/Universal Images Group via Getty

At home in **Hampstead**



New End, from £3.85 million

Situated on a quiet, central street, this new development affords long views across the village and London beyond. It's a collection of 17 beautifully designed apartments, ranging from studio flats to four-bedroom homes, which share landscaped gardens, a gym, concierge services and underground parking.
Knight Frank (020-3918 9455; www.knightfrank.com)



Frognaal, £7,000pw (£30,437pcm)

Part of a period conversion, Elmpoint spans more than 2,800 sq ft arranged across three floors. It has elegant reception rooms, an airy kitchen and breakfast room and six bedrooms—the master suite is particularly opulent. Outside, there is a landscaped garden with a heated swimming pool.
Arlington Residential (020-7722 3322; www.arlingtonresidential.com)



Heathside, £7.65 million

Few properties have better access to the expanse of Hampstead Heath than this Grade II-listed Georgian house, which stands right next to it. It's perfect for entertaining, with large reception rooms and plenty of interesting details, plus, outside, there is a mature garden complete with an inviting terrace for alfresco dining in summer.
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