



NORTHERN HEIGHTS CIRCUIT

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

Section 5 : Golders Hill Park to Kenwood House



Theme : English landscape gardening at its most creative

Highlights : Golders Hill Park, the Hill House pergola and the Kenwood Estate

Prepared by The Highgate Society, in partnership with the City of London and Camden Council.

A : Planning your trip:

The walk starts at the refreshment centre in Golders Hill Park and ends at Kenwood House. Allow an hour for the 1.8 mile (2.9 km) walk.

The middle section of the walk, where it crosses Hampstead Heath, can be muddy after rain. Stout shoes are recommended. There are a couple of sections where you will need to take care not to lose your way. Dogs are prohibited on one short section which is easy to avoid.

This section of the Northern Heights Circuit will be of particular interest to people who would like to learn more about landscape gardening as it passes through three magnificent examples of gardens created by wealthy estate owners. It is spectacularly colourful in May and late October.

For a longer walk you could continue using section one of the Northern Heights Circuit as far as Highgate Village. From there it is easy to return to your starting point at Golders Green underground station or to continue to Archway underground station using the 102 bus.

Although it would be equally enjoyable to walk this section in the reverse direction there are points on the route when finding your route would be less easy.

Children should find much to enjoy on this section of the Northern Heights Circuit.

The gates to Kenwood estate close at 16.45 in winter and at 20.30 in summer

Reaching Golders Hill Park :

Take the **Edgware** branch of the Northern Line as far as **Golders Green** Underground station. At the exit of the station turn left. Outside the area where the buses turn wait about three minutes at stand GJ either for a 102 bus (destination **Finsbury Park**) or a 268 bus (destination **Finchley Road**). Alight after three minutes at the second stop when the bus announces "**Hampstead Way**". Note: this is a "request" stop so be sure to press the red stop button. Cross at the pedestrian crossing and you will find yourself at the entrance to **Golders Hill Park**. Bear slightly to the right. The **refreshment centre** is now straight in front of you.

Journey time from Oxford Circus should be about 45 minutes.

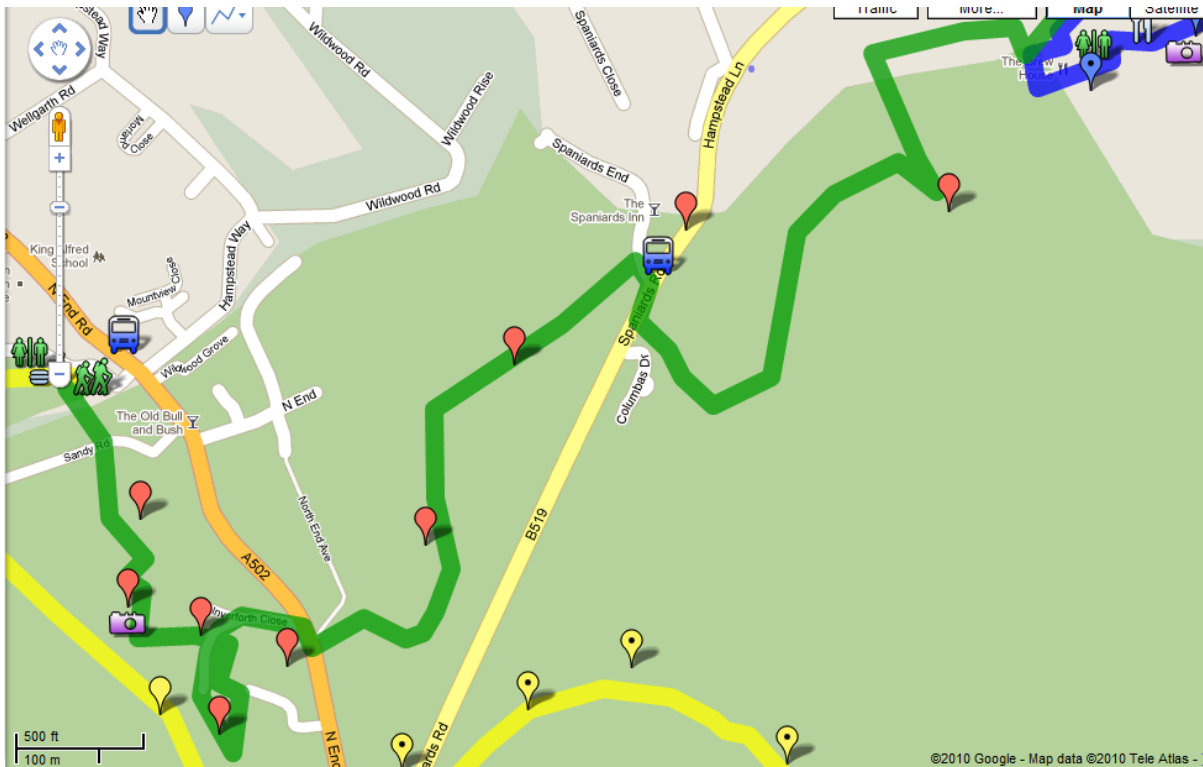
Returning from Kenwood House :

Just behind Kenwood House runs **Hampstead Lane**. Stay on the same side of the road to catch the 210 bus, destination Brent Cross every seven minutes, via the entrance of **Golders Hill Park** to the **Edgware** branch of the Northern Line at **Golders Green**. Alternatively cross the road for a 210 bus, destination Finsbury Park Station every seven minutes via **Highgate Village** to the **High Barnet** branch of the Northern Line at **Archway**. Note these are "request" stops so be sure to catch the attention of the driver as the bus arrives.

Facilities

There is a cafe at the start of the walk in **Golders Hill Park**. Two thirds of the way along the walk you come to a historic inn, **The Spaniards**. At Kenwood you have the choice of two cafes, **The Brewhouse** and **The Steward's Room**.

There are public toilets at **Golders Hill Park** and at **Kenwood House**.



C : The walk :

501 : This section starts at the refreshment centre in **Golders Hill Park**. If you haven't already walked section four of the North London Circuit you would be well advised to begin this section with a tour of Golders Hill Park.

Golders Hill Park was originally the grounds of an 18th century country mansion. In 1898 on the death of its owner, Queen Victoria's surgeon, it was purchased for the nation. It is now maintained by the **City of London**.

Whilst you are in the park dogs must be kept on leads.

502 : Walking downhill from the refreshment centre you soon reach the walled **flower garden** and a pleasant **water garden**. Continue along the path and over a hump backed bridge which crosses an **ornamental stream**.



The water garden at Golders Hill Park

503 : Bearing left along the contour of the hillside you will reach a recently renovated **children's zoo** and aviary. Beyond this is a children's **adventure playground** in a pleasant setting.

504 : Retracing your steps note an enclosure of **fallow deer**. Keeping this enclosure on your right walk up the hill towards the entrance gate from which you get an excellent view across **Golders Green, Hendon and Mill Hill**.

505 : Continue on a metalled path along the inside perimeter path. On your left you will pass an early 20th century **bandstand**. When you are opposite the refreshment centre turn right to leave the park.

506 : Cross the track that runs parallel to the perimeter of the park and climb a short flight of steps to a sandy knoll crowned with a small stand of **Scots pines**. Scots pines are not native to Hampstead Heath. Most were planted to enhance the landscape on knolls of thin, acid soils. The estate owners planted to bring back memories of visits to Italy, fashionable at that time.

507 : To the right there are distant views towards **Harrow-on-the-Hill**. To your left you will see **North End**, originally a hamlet of humble cottages built by landless labourers on the edge of the Heath. The area of gorse bushes, known as the “drying ground”, acquired its name from the practice of washerwomen using gorse bushes to dry clothes.

508 : When the **Northern line** was extended from Hampstead to Golders Green in 1901 a station was to have been built at North End. The plan was abandoned once the farmland that it had been assumed would be sold for residential development was purchased to extend Hampstead Heath by what is now known as the “**Heath Extension**”. The underground platforms were built and can still be seen from the tube.

509 : Continuing along the undulating path, taking care not to trip on exposed tree roots, you will arrive shortly at the entrance to **Hill Garden**: dogs are not allowed here. Hill Garden is one of London’s least known and least visited gardens due to its poor access by public transport and absence of a car park. You may be able to see recently re-introduced heather near the entrance.

510 : Inside the garden, turn to the right and then bear left down the slope to an **ornamental fish pond**. Beside it is a recently restored pavilion which was built in the 1920s to serve a tennis court. Though the lawn drops steeply to the right, the view to the west is blocked by the growth of vegetation since the garden was originally created, because animals no longer graze on the Heath beyond.

511 : The views that the garden once enjoyed can be seen more clearly if you climb the brick steps on the structure immediately in front of

you. This is the **pergola** - the largest and most elaborate example of its kind in Britain.

A pergola is a landscape feature consisting of a horizontal trellis supported on posts that carry climbing plants and which can be used as a covered walk. Pergolas were popular in the late 19th century as a place for the rich to take a stroll amid rambling climbing plants and the scent of roses. The construction of this particular one was started in 1906. Its designer was Thomas Mawson.

http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/B5F7A42F-FA5A-4087-A3A4-C3FFE907EB2D/0/OS_HH_pergola.pdf

512 : At the top of the pergola turn to the right where you will find a small belvedere designed to provide a viewpoint across the landscape that **John Constable** so fondly painted. This view stretched along the Thames valley past Harrow-on-the-Hill as far as **Windsor Castle**. When the tree tops were lower this scene would often be framed, as Constable’s paintings were, by turbulent cloudscapes driven towards this viewpoint by the prevailing winds.



The Pergola, Hill Garden

513 : Walking back along the pergola you can enjoy the variety of climbing plants that have been re-introduced since its **restoration** in 1994. You look out across the wilderness of the **West Heath** path which features towards the end of section four.

514 : Recently, **brown long-eared bats** have been discovered roosting by the pergola.

515 : Shortly you cross a small bridge which rises up and over a track deep below and see in front of you the grounds of **Inverforth House**.



Inverforth House

Inverforth House was built in its current form by William Lever (1851-1925), later **Viscount Leverhulme**, the soap magnate and founder of what has since become Unilever.

516 : When he owned the house from 1904 until his death in 1925 its grounds were separated from Hill House by a public right of way. Dissatisfied by the physical constraints of his original estate he sought not only to acquire the house and grounds of Hill House but also to **terminate public access** to the right of way that divided the properties.

Persistently thwarted by the local council in a matter that has recent parallels, he came upon the solution of constructing the pergola in front of his grounds and extending it via this **bridge** into the grounds of Hill House which he subsequently bought.

517 : The task of creating this pergola was both facilitated and financed by the timely extension of the Northern Line under Leverhulme's property in 1905 since it enabled him charge the contractors for the right to raise **tunnel spoil** through a shaft and onto his property where it was used as backfill to the pergola.

518 : Continue to the end of the pergola. Then descend a spiral metal staircase to ground level where you can walk back through the kitchen garden below the pergola until you reach a **garden gate** to access the right of way which so vexed Lord Leverhulme. Turn right under the bridge which you recently crossed and up **Inverforth Close** until you reach **North End Road** (higher up the hill from the entrance to Golders Hill Park).

519 : Crossing the road, keep to a path to the immediate right of a Corporation of London sign across an open patch of **grassland**. Continue in the same general direction until you come to more open undulating ground, lightly vegetated except for the occasional mature oak tree.



The path as it enters Sandy Heath

520 : This area is managed using **coppice rotation** to create a mosaic of different vegetation heights. This provides a variety of nesting conditions and prevents woodland encroachment.

521 : The large area of gorse that can be found here provides a good habitat for nesting birds such as **long tailed tits**. At the fork of the path where it passes the gorse bushes keep to the left.

522 : You will shortly see to your left the first of **four small ponds**. It is one of the best ponds on the heath for frogs due to its well vegetated and shallow nature.



Sand-digging on Sandy Heath, 1867. To the right is Spaniards Road

523 : The undulating landscape is the result of the thick beds of **sand** that covered this, the highest section of Hampstead Heath. The sand was excavated during the second half of the 19th century for use in the mortar needed for laying bricks. During war time it was used to fill sand-bags. These excavations had reduced

the landscape to one of total despoliation when this part of the Heath entered public ownership in 1889.



300 year oaks on Sandy Heath

524 : Evidence of the depth of working may be seen by comparing the level of the land with that of the roadway, Spaniards Road, which you can at times see to your right. It is also evident in places where the base of **ancient oaks** stands more than a metre above the surrounding land, their roots still clearly visible.



Iron pan ponds

525 : How ponds survive in such a sandy environment may seem strange since they are not fed by springs nor do they drain anywhere. The explanation is that the sandy Bagshot Beds contain deposits of iron which when soaked in water oxidise and cause the sand to coalesce into an impermeable sandstone layer known as **iron pan**.

526 : Though the discolouration caused by the iron gives the appearance of pollution these ponds support distinctive and thriving eco systems. They support a population of smooth newts and rudd. A Heron can often be found

fishing and as many as 40 mandarin duck have been known to overwinter.

527 : Beyond the further of the two ponds you will soon clearly see evidence of a former **roadway**, the only level feature of the terrain. This linked Highgate Village to North End, the settlement just above Golders Hill Park.

528 : Towards the end of this easy path are two spectacular **coppiced beeches**, reminders of the time when this common land was used as a source of timber. Coppicing is a method of woodland management used since medieval times. It involves repeatedly cutting young tree stems down to near ground so that new shoots emerge which after a number of years all more productive harvesting than if the tree had been allowed to grow unhindered.



Evidence of coppicing

529 : Amid a stand of **fir** trees is one much taller one, believed to be the last of a group planted in about 1745 by John Turner from seeds gathered near Ravenna in Italy. This group was drawn by John Constable in 1820.



John Constable, 'Fir Trees at Hampstead', 1820.

530 : You reach a main road and a cluster of old houses. The house immediately in front of you is **Heath End House**, from 1889 the home of **Canon Samuel Barnett** and his wife, the social reformer **Henrietta Barnett** (1851-1936).

In 1904 Henrietta Barnett appointed the architect **Raymond Unwin** to design the layout for the nearby **Hampstead Garden Suburb**. The innovatory principles of Unwin's design have had a major influence on the town planning profession ever since.

531 : A friend of **Octavia Hill**, Henrietta Barnett from 1903 also led the campaign to extend the Heath northwards from Sandy Heath through the creation by acquisition of the **Heath Extension**.



Cattle trough

532 : Beside the roadway you can see one of the few remaining examples of the work of the **Metropolitan Drinking Fountain and Cattle Trough Association**. This was formed in 1859 to improve sanitary arrangements and to foster animal welfare. It was supported both from Queen Victoria's husband, **Prince Albert**, and the **Archbishop of Canterbury**. By 1885 over 50,000 horses were drinking daily from the Association's troughs in London.

[http://www.drinkingfountains.org/Attachments\(PDF\)/DFA%20History.pdf](http://www.drinkingfountains.org/Attachments(PDF)/DFA%20History.pdf)

533 : Beyond Heath End House is **The Spaniards**, an ancient oak panelled inn and tavern, full of character. Built in 1585 as a tollgate inn on the Finchley boundary, it formed the entrance to the Bishop of London's estate. An original **boundary stone** from 1755 can still be seen in the front garden.



The Spaniards and the toll house

534 : Opposite The Spaniards is an old **toll house**. In 1961 it survived a proposal to demolish it to improve the flow of traffic. It

continues its search for a new role whilst still impeding the traffic. Both it and The Spaniards are listed buildings.



The Spaniards Inn, 1899

535 : The pub has a great literary heritage. It is mentioned in Dickens's **The Pickwick Papers** and was frequented by the painter **Joshua Reynolds**, some of whose work is displayed at Kenwood House. Its proximity to Leigh Hunt's home in the Vale of Health (section four) made it a regular haunt of the poets **Lord Byron** and **John Keats**.

536 : To continue your walk to Kenwood House retrace your steps past a roadside flower stall, cross the road at the pedestrian crossing, turn right and, after 30 paces, turn left at a small gap in the fence marked by a sign.



Sign alerting motorists to deer

This entrance to the **Kenwood Estate** is named after a local historian **C W Ikin**. The house and grounds are maintained by **English Heritage**.

537 : With the grounds of exclusive properties to your left and right descend the trail, turning more steeply to the left after a short distance. soon you emerge from the woods into the **West Meadow**. This area forms the western quarter of the Kenwood grounds and includes a gravel cattle track running north south.



As elsewhere on Hampstead Heath, trees are left to rot where they fall

538 : Slightly to the left is a good viewpoint from which it is possible to see **Witanhurst** and the spire of **St Michael's Church** in Highgate (see section one).

539 : Further down in the fenced off section, **sphagnum moss** grows in an acidic 'flush' where ground water, trapped by clay in the soil creates spring lines. Given the rarity of sphagnum in this region the area is included within Hampstead Heath Site of Special Scientific Interest.



Springs where sphagnum mosses grow

540 : Turning left along this track it is now an easy walk, the track curving with the contour, until you come to a gate which marks the boundary of the formal gardens of Kenwood House.

Dogs must be kept on leads from now on.

541 : Shortly beyond the gate in a clearing immediately in front of you is the work "**Reclining Figure**" by the sculptor **Henry Moore**. This is one of a number of works in the grounds of Kenwood House, including "**Monolith Empyrean**" (Heavenly Stone) by **Barbara Hepworth** (1953), who lived in Hampstead, and "**Flamme**" by **Eugene Dodeigne** (1983).



Reclining Figure No 5 looking out over the Kenwood estate

542 : From this point you enjoy an excellent view of the country estate of **William Murray**, a Lord Chief Justice who subsequently became the 1st Earl Mansfield. It was his nephew who commissioned the most celebrated landscape designer of the age, **Humphry Repton** (1752-1818), to re-design the park surrounding Kenwood House. Repton was also consulted over the design of the estate of what subsequently became Golders Hill Park.

<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/daysout/properties/kenwood-house/>

543 : The original early 17th century house was bought by Mansfield for £4,000 in 1754. The commission of its interior redesign was awarded to **Robert Adam**, (1728 – 1792), one of England’s best known designers of country houses.

544 : Mansfield has a major place in world history because, as the judge in the 1772 Somerset case, he ruled that slavery was incompatible with English law. The house was also the home for 30 years of **Dido Elizabeth Belle** (1763 - 1804), the illegitimate daughter of Lord Mansfield’s nephew, Sir John Lindsay, a British Navy Captain, and an enslaved woman who he met when in the Caribbean.

545 : Turning back towards the house you cross a small stream and find yourself approaching a terrace bordered by limes. Turn to the left, making your way through winding paths bordered by **rhododendrons** and **azaleas** which, when they were first planted in Repton’s time, would have been exotic imports from China. These thrive on

Kenwood’s acidic sandy soils and provide spectacular displays of blossom in early May.



The west garden in May

546 This formal garden is artfully laid out to provide a variety of vistas of the house and the park interrupted by **rustic arbours** and **ivy clad tunnels** in a style radically different from the geometric designs characteristic of earlier English garden design and of 18th century gardens in continental Europe. This air of natural informality is enhanced by the remains of **giant oaks** blown down during the great storm of 1987.

547 : The gardens are sheltered and overlooked from the north by the ancient woodlands that run along the crest of the ridge. They are inhabited by **jackdaws**, a rarity so close to London, and bizarrely, **ring-necked parakeets**.

548 : Walking around and perhaps across the lawns, back to the terrace you may want to stop outside the **orangery** to look across Repton’s estate. A **fossil** oyster shell can be seen at the foot of the left-most pillar of the Kenwood House orangery. The Portland Limestone also contains shapes which are the burrows of creatures that once lived on the sea floor.



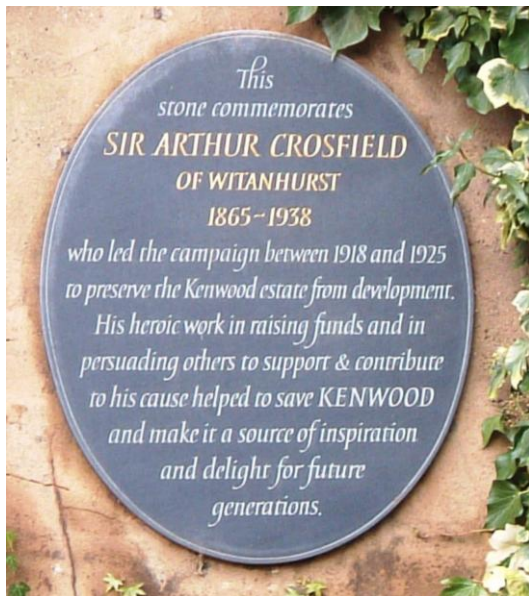
Fossilised oyster shell on a pillar outside the Orangery

549 : The little **white bridge** to the left of the lake is a single-sided folly, but completes the view seen from the house perfectly. When the estate was laid out it was possible to see ships in the Thames. Today it is difficult to credit you are standing in Europe's largest city.



Kenwood House, 1860

550 : This terrace was the location for the wedding scene featuring **Hugh Grant** and **Julia Roberts** in the romantic comedy “**Notting Hill**” (1999). Summer concerts are held on the lawns it overlooks.



Commemoration of Sir Arthur Crosfield

551 : Before entering the house you can refresh yourself at **The Steward's Room** or **The Brewhouse** (disabled access, toilets). Continue along the terrace until you see a plaque commemorating the role of **Sir Arthur**

Crosfield in the campaign to acquire Kenwood and its estate for the nation.



The bath room

552 : At the foot of the steps leading to the two cafes is a **bath house** from the early 18th century, a period when it was fashionable to take cold baths. It makes use of a natural chalybeate spring, the red colouration resulting from iron salts.

552 : Beyond the cafes is a **Ranger's Office** where you can find out all about the woodlands, wildlife and management of the Kenwood estate.



The south facade of Kenwood House

553 : To enter the house itself return to the terrace. Just beyond the **Orangery** at the far end of the terrace (from the buttery), turn right past **ornamental gardens** and right again to the main entrance of the house (entrance free, disabled access to ground floor, toilets).

Inside you can enjoy one of London's premier **collections of paintings**, including masterpieces by Rembrandt, Vermeer, Turner, Reynolds and Gainsborough, as well as the

Suffolk collection of rare Elizabethan portraits. Make sure you also visit the library. The paintings were donated to the nation on the death in 1926 of **Lord Iveagh**, a member of the Irish family that owned the Guinness brewery.



Rembrandt : Self portrait

Brochures about the house and the estate and souvenirs are available at the gift shop.

554 : Kenwood House marks the end of section five of the Northern Heights Circuit. You then have three choices: following section one of the Northern Heights Circuit to continue on along the Hampstead-Highgate ridge as far **Highgate Village**; to follow the driveway from the main entrance back to **Hampstead Lane** and take a 210 bus (every eight minutes) from the same side of the road back to **Golders Green** Underground station; or to cross the road and continue to **Highgate** or to **Archway Underground** station using the 210 bus in the opposite direction.

555 : Whilst waiting for the bus you may find it interesting to learn that Kenwood House used to be closer to Hampstead Lane, until the Earl of Mansfield found its proximity uncongenial and had the road **moved** marginally to the north. To screen his property he then planted the thicket of trees and shrubs you have just walked through.

Further information:

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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