

Introducing Heathcroft

The first in a series taking a look at some of the apartment blocks on the Suburb

When compared to their European neighbours in major cities, Londoners have been less inclined to live in a flat rather than a house. However, right from the start of the Suburb, Henrietta Barnett and her committee understood the importance of flats, especially to the single, the young married couple and the retired.

The first blocks of flats to be built were probably in the artisans' quarter – those in Addison Way and at the northern entrance to the Suburb, Temple Fortune House and Arcade House. The most recent replace the motor show rooms and service station at the corner of Kingsley Way and Lyttelton Road.

Of the 5,107 dwellings on the Suburb about 30 per cent are flats. In a series of articles we hope to highlight some of these to demonstrate the thought and care that went into their production, the variety of design and the mixed nature of the communities now living there. Whether tenant or owner-occupier, short term or long term, all are encouraged to take advantage of, and to participate in, the activities of the Suburb. The first in this series is Heathcroft.

Heathcroft is a Grade II Neo-Georgian block of 99 flats at the south end of Hampstead Way. It was built in 1923-24 to the design of J.B.F. Cowper, the architect who won the competition set by Second Hampstead Tenants Ltd for 'labour-saving flats for middle class families'.

The nine three- and four-storey blocks are constructed around a grassy courtyard in the attractive red/brown brick with orange dressings seen in other parts of the Suburb. The tall chimneys remind one of the original need for fireplaces in living rooms and bedrooms. The flats now have central heating but a number still retain their original fireplaces with Arts and Crafts tiles. There is great variation in size and design of the flats – from the single bedroom to the four-

bedroom with spacious drawing room, dining room and entrance hall. Rooms are rarely of uniform shape with unexpected angles and niches. A few have balconies or French windows overlooking the heath or gardens.

Initially, flats were leased to tenants by the company. As Henrietta foresaw, they proved popular as the Northern Line to Golders Green was by then fully operational. They were particularly popular to men working in the city, especially to single young gentlemen – who may have been interested in its proximity to Waterlow Court which provided flats for young working ladies. Two uniformed residential porters attended to maintenance.

The early kitchens were fairly basic as a well-supported restaurant with 'modern' kitchen facilities provided lunch and evening meals for tenants and their guests. Considerable thought was given to recreation. There was a ballroom, a tennis court, badminton court and bowling green. Sadly none of these remain. The kitchen and ballroom became additional flats and a car park was built over the tennis court. However there is a meadow shared with residents of Wellgarth Road for picnics or games if one does not wish to venture over the road to the heath.

In the absence of a census it is hard to discover much about the individuals who lived here earlier. We are told it became



popular with retired judges, military personnel and the occasional vicar. Young couples tended to move out to a house following the birth of their first child. Following WW II patterns of living changed. People became more interested in providing their own meals. The restaurant and the ballroom were not supported sufficiently to maintain their continued use. By the mid 1970s flats began to be sold. Residents became an aging population. A young newcomer was asked why she wanted to live among so many elderly people.

Gradually all that has changed. Interiors have been modernised and, finally, in 2007, after 20 years of negotiation by a very persistent, hardworking Residents Committee, the purchase of freeholds, originally owned by Freshwater, was completed. Freeholders are now shareholders in Heathcroft 2002 Ltd, the holding company and appoint/reappoint it's directors annually. Management agents supervise the day-to-day running of Heathcroft and a porter and porter/gardener organise general maintenance.

Many who bought their flat and moved out have kept their property, letting it out to long or short-term tenants. About half the flats are owner-occupied and half tenanted.

So who are the current tenants? They include several lawyers, couples who work for the big city conglomerates, retired physicians, practising psychotherapists, a fashion image enhancer, a Russian translator who works with the police, couples with young children and a retired gentleman who takes his cat for a daily constitutional

around the garden. In other words, a very typical Suburb mix.

It is a very happy environment. We all feel so fortunate to live here – right opposite the rural delights of the Heath Extension, magical under snow in winter, sweet smelling with the wild flowers of spring and glorious for picnics and walks in summer and autumn.

BRIDGET COX

Thanks for assistance with the historical background are due to Jane Blackburn, Steve Drummond and Alan Singlehurst.

Cracking up? Our guide to subsidence might help

Before I bought my house in Hampstead Garden Suburb, a building survey was carried out on the property. One section, headed 'Foundations', stated that 'the property is built in an area of London clay. This type of subsoil is prone to volume changes which can cause damage to buildings by way of subsidence or heave.'

Five years later, in the summer of 2006, various problems occurred. My bedroom door would not close, there were large cracks between the kitchen and living room walls

and a plasterboard ceiling fell down. The house was, clearly, moving: I (or it!) had subsidence.

I contacted my insurance company and for nearly two years, after innumerable phone calls, visits from surveyors, drain experts, arboriculturists, and the installation of equipment to monitor the cracks and test the soil for tree roots, a meeting was finally held to discuss dates when the work could be carried out.

Originally, I was to stay in the house and my furniture was to be stored in the garden under a tarpaulin. This did not seem a good idea, so I was told to find alternative accommodation. I then had to find a removal company and move out. The enormous amount of time this took should not be under-estimated. In my 'new' house, I had a great deal of trouble reconnecting the phone and for the whole three months I was there, no TV reception was possible.

The work carried out on my property was mostly superficial: the cracks were filled in and it was decorated inside and out. After I moved back, in 2008, I suggested to the then chairman of the Residents' Association that it might be an idea to produce a leaflet to help other residents who found themselves in the same predicament as me.

He proposed that I should set up a Subsidence Working Group to carry out the task of producing such a document. I recruited several people who had had subsidence and were willing to share their experiences. We decided to carry out a survey, but before anything major happened, we were approached by Simon Blausten, a local chartered surveyor, who had already produced such a document for his clients and was willing to let us use it in a slightly different form. It has taken another two years to get it off the ground, as various

committees, as well as the HGS Trust, needed to approve its contents. I am most grateful to Janet Elliott, RA chairman, Jane Blackburn, Trust manager, and, of course, to Simon Blausten, for the interest and time they have devoted to the project.

So at last How to deal with Subsidence Problems is available to all. You can download it from www.hgs.org.uk/subsidence, or buy a paper version, costing £3, from the HGS Trust office at 862 Finchley Road and from Fellowship House in Willifield Way. If you have subsidence, I am sure you will find it useful. But I really hope that you will never need it...

JUDITH SAMSON



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