

A walk along Holloway Road. From Denmark Place to the Archway Tavern

The Holloway Road is not a route you might choose for an afternoon stroll. It is too battered by traffic, pollution and noise, and its architectural highlights are often hidden away above the normal eyeline or down side streets. It is no longer the grand shopping street that it was in its greatest years, between the 1880s and the First World War. It now has a new vibrancy, with neighbourhood centres around St. Mary Magdalene in the south, the university area around Holloway Road station, the Nag's Head centre and then further north towards Archway. But it is nowhere near as grand as in its Victorian and Edwardian heyday.

Its architectural treasures are being opened up by the new survey of Islington's locally listed buildings in which the Islington Society is closely involved. These are buildings which have no statutory protection but are regarded as valuable to the community because of their architectural and historic merit. This survey is now complete and awaiting adoption by Islington Council. It offers a descriptive, historical, architectural and photographic survey of all the borough's locally listed buildings.

This survey shows that Holloway Road has an immense amount of architectural value. Much of it is best viewed from the top of a bus but the rest is worth a few diversions off the main road on foot.

We start at **Nos. 99-113** on the left side as you travel north. This was built as a mixed residential and retail terrace with shops on the ground floor and homes above. The decoration is elaborate and Italianate and the developer clearly meant it to make a statement. To see it properly you have to brave the traffic to the other side of the road. The central bay has extra stucco decoration and a pediment at roof level, where the terrace is clearly named **Denmark Place** and dated 1863. This was the time of the Schleswig Holstein wars between Denmark and the newly emergent and aggressive Prussia, so the terrace may have been named after the side the British tended to favour.



Denmark Place

Denmark Place was built before Holloway Road's commercial success, close to the early Victorian residential villas in Furlong Road and Crane Grove. Walking further north we come to **Nos. 146 to 152 Holloway Road**. This is late Victorian or Edwardian Baroque at its most flamboyant and was built in the days when Holloway Road was at its peak as a shopping centre. The shop fronts have decayed somewhat but the upper parts are what matter.



Nos. 146-152 Holloway Road

The developer must have had money to spend. The upper parts are elaborately decorated in brick and terracotta with a grand asymmetrical topping of a pediment on the left and cupola on the right. The building is set back behind its shopfronts so again you need to cross to the other side of the road to see it properly.

Walking further north we make a short detour down **Eden Grove**. Here are two locally listed buildings which are memorials to the strength of the Victorian Roman Catholic church in this part of London and the growth of the Irish community. One is the former **Notre Dame de Sion** school which you pass on the right, an 1870s exercise in Romanesque and Gothic styles. It is a substantial structure, twelve bays long, with single, arched, paired and triple arched windows outlined in blue brick, topped off by a row of gabled and corbelled dormers. At the end of Eden Grove is the **Sacred Heart of Jesus** Catholic church and presbytery, built in 1869-70 by FH Pownall, the Middlesex County Surveyor for 45 years until his death in 1898. This a rare relatively unaltered example of his work.

Next to it is one of Islington's most historically important locally listed buildings. This is the **Electric Lighting Station** set up by St. Mary's Vestry in 1896, making Islington one of the first local authorities in London to generate and distribute its own electricity.



No. 60 Eden Grove

At the top of the building in a decorative roundel is the date when the generating station was opened by the Lord Mayor of Islington in March 1896. Above the first floor is the name of the local authority, St. Mary's Vestry, as it was until the formation of the Metropolitan Borough of Islington in 1900. Above the arch is the building's purpose: "Electric Lighting Station". The generator began life providing street lighting but it soon provided power to private homes. In the beginning only the wealthy could afford electricity but by 1936 it was providing power to 40,000 customers through 106 miles of mains.

Back on Holloway Road we carry on northwards, past the **Holloway Road underground station** on the left. This is Heritage England Grade II listed, one of the Edwardian underground stations built at a time of rapid expansion of the network by the architect Leslie Green in 1906. They are distinctive because of his use of ox-blood red glazed terracotta tiles from the Leeds Fireclay Company.

Holloway Road station is one of the best-preserved examples of Green's work, inside and out. There are locally listed examples at Tufnell Park station on the Northern Line and the disused station at York Way, now sadly neglected.

Further north, on the right, is the locally listed former **Jones Brothers department store**. This was begun as a small draper by two Welsh brothers in 1867. It expanded rapidly and by 1892 had 500 employees, 50 horses and 35 carts and vans. In 1895 its catalogue ran to 1400 pages. Their emporium was begun in around 1900 and is unfinished. The cupola was intended to be in the centre of a French chateau style building. But in the early 1900s Holloway declined rapidly, undermining plans to extend the building to the corner of Loraine Road. Jones Brothers was closed by John Lewis, of which it was then part, in 1990.

Further north, on the left, where the City and Islington College's Marlborough House now stands, was until 1962 a fine example of the work of the prolific theatre designer Frank Matcham, the **Marlborough Theatre**.



The Marlborough Theatre before demolition in 1962.

It opened in 1902 with a week of opera by the Carl Rosa Company and flourished initially as an important suburban theatre. In 1918 it became a cinema, ending its days in the hands of the Rank Organisation, which also owned what is now the Odeon cinema on the corner of Tufnell Park Road. The Marlborough Theatre closed in 1957 and was demolished in 1962. In the first edition of his *Buildings of England*, Sir Nikolaus Pevsner, who could be caustically judgemental about buildings, described it as "gaudy".

Opposite, now sadly closed, was the locally listed Marks & Spencer. This is in the unmistakable house style of the retail chain, developed in the 1930s by the company's in-house architects and by Robert Lutyens, the son of the great Edwin Lutyens. Like Leslie Green's underground stations the Marks & Spencer shops are instantly recognisable, with their restrained classical style, facades of mottled stone and steel ground floor frontages.

Walking north, we pass two locally listed banks, the **Barclays** on the corner of Parkhurst Road, and The **National Westminster** on the corner of Hercules Street. Then on the left we come to one of Holloway Road's most important buildings, now the **National Youth Theatre**, built in 1872 by the great Victorian Scottish born architect George Truefitt.



National Youth Theatre, built as Holloway Hall by George Truefitt.

From 1865 to 1890 he was surveyor to the Tufnell Park estate nearby and he designed many of its distinctive villas, particularly in Carleton Road and Anson Road. No. 23 Carleton Road is nationally listed Grade II and No. 24 Anson Road is locally listed. He also designed St. George's Church, grade II listed, on the corner of Tufnell Park Road and Carleton Road. He was a hardworking and prolific architect with buildings still surviving from Aberdeen to Worthing, where he retired and died in 1902. This is an example of his grand public building style, classical with Romanesque and Venetian influences, built as a hall for the Holloway community. It makes an instant impact as you walk by, with its six arched windows on the first floor, decorated tympani, and a heavy dentil cornice at roof level. It is an important example of work by one of Islington's most creative Victorian architects.

A bit further up the hill we come to what was grandly called **Belgrave Terrace** when it was built in the 1850s-60s, before Holloway Road had its years of commercial success in the 1890s and 1910s.



Belgrave Terrace, No. 485 Holloway Road

Belgrave Terrace begins at No. 485 Holloway Road and is made up of four elaborate terraced villas. Time has not dealt with them kindly. Not all of them are locally listed and one of them has had its ground floor and basement replaced by a modern shop front. Much Italianate stucco has been lost. It takes time looking at them from the other side of the road to work out how they originally fitted together. But when Islington locally listed them in 1978 it recognised their value. That listing and their location in the Mercers Road/Tavistock Terrace conservation area has ensured they have survived even in their current damaged state.

Walk a few yards back to Manor Gardens on the righthand side of the road. Near the corner with Holloway Road on the left is a war memorial arch, all that survives of the casualty department of the Royal Northern Hospital, designed in 1923 by Percy Adams. Behind the iron gates, on Portland stone slabs on either side of the arch, are inscribed the names of the 1,207 Islingtonians who died in the First World War. This touching survival was once locally listed by Islington but Heritage England have now given it a national grade II listing. It was preserved when the hospital was closed in 1992 and the rear part of the site redeveloped.



Islington War Memorial, Manor Gardens

Further along on the left are the buildings of the Manor Gardens Centre, founded in 1913 as the North Islington Welfare Centre and School for Mothers. Two pairs of 1860s villas form the wings of the building and are Heritage England grade II listed. The space between them was sensitively filled in in the 1920s to form the Centre as it stands today. There is an excellent book by Andrew Turton, published by the Centre, which outlines the history of the first hundred years of one of the great achievements of early 20th century philanthropy.

Opposite is the Beaux Arts building, an enormous ten storey Edwardian Baroque pile which dominates everything in the street. It was built for the Post Office as the centre of its money order business and has now been converted into flats. Cherry and Pevsner say it was built. “on a harsh and barely comprehensible scale”. In spite of this it has been locally listed by Islington. It’s the sort of building which bullies its way to recognition.

Return to Holloway Road and turn right towards the junction with Landseer Road. On the corner is the locally listed frontage of the Crown public house, one of the best pub exteriors in north Islington, an 1890s-1910s Arts and Crafts design. It stands out because of the high quality of its glazing, which is largely intact. The pattern is consistent on both frontages, with two or three mullions and four transoms per window. The glass is mottled with coloured panes. The frontages are topped off with a

facia which curves round the street corner. This is a very fine pub frontage of an unusual and high-quality design.

Further up the road on the right is Kingsdown Road, built in the 1860s, which is in marked contrast to the humbler streets around it. No. 1 Kingsdown Road is double fronted, with elaborate Italianate stone and stucco external decoration and a fine front entrance. Most of the houses on the left-hand side of the road are locally listed, all surprisingly grand and with ambitious detailing.



No. 1 Kingsdown Road

Further up the hill one of the most familiar landmarks at the top end of Holloway Road. St. John's Church, Heritage England Grade II listed, was built by Sir Charles Barry in 1826-28 with Church Commissioners money. It was one of a group of Islington churches designed at the same time by Barry, among them Holy Trinity Cloudesley Square which is currently being restored. All were intended to provide places of worship for new communities as London stretched northwards. Barry designed the interiors as plain Georgian style preaching halls, with galleries. But religious fashion quickly changed and all the surviving interiors are much altered. Barry also designed the former school next door. There are some fine slightly later villas next door in Pemberton Gardens.

On the other side of Holloway Road is a pair of locally listed shopfronts, Nos. 734 & 736, now a single kitchen showroom. They are of a standard late Victorian or Edwardian type, with strong pilasters and capitals with facia and cornice above. It was restored in 1996 but retains the basic structure of its facade, including the glazing bars on the front door and the tiling in the door recess. A shop with this frontage is known to have been in existence in 1906 and probably well before that. The shop was known as Silver's Corner after Stanley Silver who ran a business there for about 35 years, ending in

1996. He was a well-known local figure, making children's toys and board games from a workshop in No. 734. He was known as 'Mr. Bubbles', and as 'Kojak', because of his bald head.

On the same side of the road, further towards Archway, is St. Gabriel's Roman Catholic Church. This is uncompromisingly Modernist in style, built in 1967 by Gerrard Goalen. There are not many examples of Islington Modernism on the Local List, so this is an important inclusion. It is rectangular with curved corners, circular projections and a very solid appearance. It is mainly of dark brick with a concrete and translucent glass porch. Above is a belfry with three bells, topped by a metal cross. It is worth looking inside if it is open, for its "elegantly and un-fussily handled" interior" (Cherry and Pevsner).

To the north, on the same side of the road, is No. 4-6 Elthorne Road, now Bellside House. This was originally built in the early 1900s as Batavia Mills, an important reminder of Islington's industrial past. It was owned by Betts & Co., which manufactured thin foils of lead and tin for packaging tea and chocolates, and making metallic capsules. It was an important employer in the area, second only to the hospital with 900 employees at its peak. Its name is reflected in the high-quality ironwork, which outlines an elaborate letter B.



4-6 Elthorne Road, the former Batavia Mills.

Back on the Holloway Road the end of the walk comes into view. The Archway Tavern was built in 1886 by JG Ensor, architect for Watney's brewery. Its Renaissance revival eclectic style was much favoured by late Victorian brewers and it has a commanding position on Navigation Square looking down Holloway Road. Compared to the earliest known photograph of the building, from 1904, its frontage has survived relatively unscathed and it looks much better with a new open paved area to

the front. You might be lucky enough to get a restorative drink there; it has re-opened as a pub, though its licensing hours are still restricted.

References: The Buildings of England, London 4 North, Cherry and Pevsner

Manor Gardens Centre 1913-2013 Andrew Turton

Historic England listing details www.historicengland.org.uk

Volunteer surveys, Islington Local List project, by the author and by others, for which many thanks.

Islington Past. John Richardson

Islington History Centre for the Electric Lighting Station

Johnlewismemorystore.org.uk

www.cinematreasure.org/theaters/4302