

Islington's Local Listings: Keys to the Past

Before, pediments were simply pediments -- not swan-necked, open, broken or even segmental. Corbels, crockets and cornices didn't mean much to me; and I certainly had no idea a stall riser was the part of a storefront below the window. Now I have a vocabulary almost worthy of architectural scholar Nikolaus Pevsner. Sir Nikolaus' book *The Buildings of England London 4: North* was among the many sources I consulted as one of 50 volunteers for the *Our Eyes on Islington* project reviewing 1,200 locally listed buildings -- more than twice as many as in Camden and Hackney.

Canonbury boasts more than 160 locally listed properties -- buildings deemed 'heritage assets' by the Council, but not of the statutory listing standards required by Historic England. I investigated 125 properties in the Canonbury Conservation Area for this initiative run in partnership with Islington Council, Historic England and The Building Exploratory. Islington's Local History Centre was indispensable for research. But this undertaking was less about reading books, and more about reading buildings -- from Victorian villas to tucked-away terraces, and pubs transformed into hipster flats.

Always an admirer of Canonbury's heritage, surveying it allowed me to zoom right in -- former architectural 'acquaintances' became firm friends as I inspected, described and photographed them over the months. Buildings I once whizzed past on the way to the tube or Overground now command my attention.

- Take the five glorious mid-Victorian terraces adorning Wallace Road (nos 2-28) and its cul de sac -- comprised of 27 period houses whose architectural unity endures despite the ravages of time, multiple occupation and war.
- And the charming shop fronts at the top of Canonbury Lane (nos 21, 23 and 25) contributing to an archetypal Victorian shopping parade wrapping around to Upper Street. Number 25, the Four Sisters pub, is named after the four Miss Vincents who kept a coffee and confectionary shop there as early as 1905.
- And 1 Hope Villas with its triumphant Victorian turret and ornate finials, which forms the cornerstone for surrounding Georgian houses where Wallace and St Paul's Road meet.

And the list goes on. [You'll find the current one on the Canonbury Society website.](#) The project will culminate in October with a website portraying each of Islington's local listings to celebrate our heritage and ensure the legacy of these buildings is understood and cherished when new developments are proposed and planning decisions are taken.

Rosemary J Brown

404 words with photos