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Winchmore Hill The Village

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Winchmore Hill – A Suburban Village

For those who yearn for the idyll of village life without the isolation, north London's Winchmore Hill is the perfect location. It has a fascinating history that lingers in every street, a hilltop position, a great community spirit, a wide variety of shops and eateries, good schools and an easy commute to the City.



From Wynsermerhull to Winchmore Hill

The leafy suburb we know now as Winchmore Hill grew from a tiny hamlet in the then rural Middlesex forest in the parish of Edmonton. It is said that the hamlet has its origins in pre-Tudor times when those suffering from religious persecution took refuge among the forest's dense, impenetrable bushes. The refugees made a small clearing and built primitive shelters which developed over time into small cottages, the hamlet and, subsequently, the village. Whether or not this is true, we do know

that the earliest reference to Winchmore Hill is in a deed dated 1319AD where it's spelt Wynsermerhull. 16th century documents clearly refer to Wynsmore Hill. The name Winchmore Hill is likely to be derived from the old English "Wynsige" and "maerhyll" – the hill at the boundary of Wynsige's land.

In the 1300s the extensive woodlands were key to local industry. The woods were regularly coppiced with the oak bark being stripped and sold for use in tanning. Some of the wood was made into charcoal by the charcoal burners, or

'colyers', a profession that was highly skilled and handed down through generations of families.

Little has been recorded about the Winchmore Hill of the 16th and 17th centuries other than it being the birth place of Elizabeth Sawyer, 'the witch of Edmonton'. Elizabeth Sawyer was executed in 1621 after supposedly cursing a neighbour who died mysteriously soon afterwards.

For centuries the woods were a magical and mysterious playground, famous for their density, peace and nature and a mist-covered lake. As the hamlet grew, the area began to attract wealthy and titled families who were determined to retain the area's beauty. Even when the railway arrived in 1871, the western half of the parish (Winchmore Hill, Southgate and Palmers Green) remained rural due to the reluctance of local landowners to sell their estates for development. This half of the parish was granted separation from Edmonton in 1881 in a move masterminded by eminent barrister Sir Ralph Littler who set up the separatist movement. Although Winchmore Hill was transformed into a residential suburb in the early 20th century and became part of the London Borough of Enfield in 1965, it retains much of the character of the former rural village.





The old meets the new

Today in Winchmore Hill 19th century cottages with their attractive original clapboard (or weatherboard) facades, elegant Edwardian buildings and distinct Victorian architecture stand alongside houses built in the 1920s and '30s and the lavish properties of more recent years. Many buildings of historical note remain, including St. Paul's church, in Church Hill, which still serves an important social and religious role in the community. Built as a Waterloo church on land donated by the Grovelands estate, its ceiling was said to be the largest unsupported expanse of plaster work in Europe until it was renovated in the 1960s. Just down Church Hill sits "The Old School House", a cottage that housed the village school until 1859.

Quakers were early settlers of Winchmore Hill. The first meeting held in the area took place in a barn off Winchmore Hill Road in 1662. Life at this time was difficult for the Quakers who were persecuted for their beliefs, but the tiny, isolated hamlet of Winchmore Hill provided a safe haven and soon became a vital centre for the Society of Friends. The first Friends Meeting House and burial ground were opened in 1668. The house was rebuilt in 1790 and this is still a local landmark.

The oldest buildings in the village are the Old Bakery and Rowantree and Woodside houses, dating back more than 250 years. The latter two, at 35 and 37

The Green, were originally a single dwelling called Woodside. With their white rendered facades, they are a fine example of 18th century architecture.

The earliest surviving pub in Winchmore Hill is probably the Green Dragon which was built in 1726 and initially located at the junction of Green Lanes and Green Dragon Lane. However, in those days highwaymen were executed near to where they were caught.

Some were hung from gallows close to the inn and left for several days. Naturally, this was bad for business so the owner moved the inn to the bottom of Vicars Moor Lane. The Green Dragon of today is actually the third incarnation of the inn. The second building was demolished in 1893 and rebuilt slightly to the west. The Green Dragon now combines an English pub with an authentic Thai restaurant.



The heart of the village

In the old days, if you crossed the stile on Dog & Duck Lane (now Bourne Hill) and followed the footpath that is now Broad Walk, you'd arrive at Winchmore Hill Green, an irregular triangle of land on a gently sloping site. The Green was the home of all community activities from political meetings to festivals and celebrations. The pretty Green, now a conservation area, remains Winchmore Hill's focal point and is where five of N21's roads converge. Although the large pond on the Green was filled in by the Council in 1908, the area still has the appearance of a historical village centre. There are few pedestrians and traffic is light. Many of the buildings around the Green are brick-built, flat-fronted Victorian terraces. Some shop fronts have kept their original feel and even the 20th century railings and Victorian-style lamps are sympathetic to a village life.



The high street hasn't imposed itself on the Green. Instead, the Green is surrounded by a delightful array of independent shops and boutiques, cafés and restaurants. Favorites include Wades Hill Butchery, the two Minsky's (one selling women's and children's fashion, the other selling bags and shoes) and The House, a popular interiors shop. Regatta on the Green provides delicious Italian food while the Kings Head is now the local gastro pub. The Kings Head bears no resemblance to the village inn it once was. It was transformed from a plain two-storied Georgian house to an elaborate turreted building in 1896. In the 19th century the Green would also have been served by the then modest Salisbury Arms but, like the Green Dragon, the inn was relocated and is now a large public house in Hoppers Road.

Of course we all need our supermarkets at times and there is a Sainsbury's in Green Lanes and another at Highlands Village on World's End Lane. This was once the site of the Northern Hospital, built in 1886 for fever and convalescent cases, which became a district general hospital named Highlands in 1948.

Larger shopping areas, leisure centres, cinemas and golf courses are within easy travelling distance in nearby Enfield, Southgate and Edmonton.

N21's greenest attraction

Grovelands Park sits on land that was originally part of the Middlesex forest and is what remains of the enchanted woodlands. The 300 acre grounds were landscaped by the legendary Humphrey Repton, and provide the setting for a beautiful mansion designed by John Nash on behalf of Walker Gray, of Quaker brewer Taylor Walker & Co. The house was named Southgate Grove. After Gray's death in 1835 the estate was purchased by his nephew John Donnithorne Taylor who was hugely influential in preserving the area. In 1830 Taylor renamed the area Woodlands and, twenty years later, renamed it again as Grovelands. The 1897 OS map still marked Grovelands as a deer park. It wasn't until 1913 that the woods were opened as a public park. During 1916 the Grade 1 listed mansion became a war hospital and is now a private hospital run by The Priory. The park itself is well-maintained with lovely green areas, a pavilion and a picturesque lake.



The well known road

One of Winchmore Hill's appeals is its fabulous variety of residential properties. Modest terraced and semi-detached houses that are full of character sit comfortably among lavish mansions in roads such as Broad Walk.

In 1319 Broad Walk was simply a footpath through the woods of Middlesex forest. By 1797 the road had been named Southgate Grove and houses were being constructed on it. It was a slow process and it wasn't until 1914 that the unsurfaced road became recognisable. Through the late 1920s and 1930s building began on the prestigious plots now known as Broad Walk and, in 1936, the road was properly lit. Records show the initial selling price for Broad Walk



properties to be as much as £3,500 – a small fortune for those days.

Today's Broad Walk is one of the new breed of London 'super-suburbs'. The road is tree-lined, with red paving, and the detached house are now stunning mansions with elaborate railings and electronic gates. The street has been resident to many famous people including Leslie Smith, co-founder of Matchbox toy company, Rod Stewart and, more recently, celebrities such as Dragon's Den James Caan.

Its own 'red carpet' history

Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, everyone's finest four fendered friend, was thought to have been built in a Regency coach house that still stands proudly at the top of Wades Hill. Much of Mike Leigh's critically acclaimed Secrets & Lies, about a professional portrait photographer, was filmed in an empty shop on Winchmore Hill

Green. Ironically, the shop was taken over by a photographer soon after filming. The site now houses the Samdan Meze & Grill Restaurant, offering fabulous Anatolian cuisine and a fine dining experience. Film producer Lord David Puttnam lived in Winchmore Hill for a while, as did the internationally famous singer Engelbert Humperdink.

An easy commute

Winchmore Hill has an over ground train station. The arrival of the railway was a landmark in the life of the village. In 1865 the Great Northern Railway Company obtained permission to build a new line to run from Wood Green to Hertford through Palmers Green and Enfield. In 1869, however, financial constraints forced these plans to be changed and the proposed section beyond Enfield to be abandoned. Palmers Green and Winchmore Hill were designated as the intervening rural stations. The line was

scheduled to be completed in 1870 (indeed, this date can be seen at the station) but the terrain was troublesome and five men died while laying the track. Furthermore, John Donnithorne Taylor, who had a policy of conservation and was thought to be behind a horse bus service to the City, made life difficult for the contractors. The station in Middle Lane (now Station Road) was eventually opened on April Fool's Day 1871.

Although this was the start of a new era of development, the line did not have a big impact on village life immediately. Initially, just 16 trains a day left Enfield for the City.

Today, the line has been extended north to Letchworth, trains run frequently and the journey to the Moorgate takes just half an hour. The train stops at Finsbury Park and Highbury & Islington where commuters can jump onto underground lines. In addition, Winchmore Hill is a short bus or car journey away from Southgate tube station.

It's an easy journey to the hustle and bustle of the City but, unsurprisingly, the residents of N21 seem happy to return to the tranquillity of Winchmore Hill. The tiny hamlet of Wynsermerhull may have grown up into a smart residential area but its rural heart remains in this suburban village.

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