



8 Stoneleigh Terrace

Highgate New Town, London N19

8 Stoneleigh Terrace is a typical example of the designs produced by *Camden Architect's Department* under Borough Architect *Sydney Cook* in the 1960s and 70s. Other notable estates include Fleet Road and Alexandra Road (by *Neave Brown* and both listed) and Branch Hill (also listed), Mansfield Road/Lamble Street and Maiden Lane (by *Gordon Benson and Alan Forsyth*).

These belong to a brief golden era when many architects fought for their belief that nothing was too good for social housing, using modern materials to create light-filled and exciting interior spaces — an era which was

ended by the inflation and growing reaction against Modernism of the seventies and by Margaret Thatcher's drastic curb on local authority spending. We are therefore unlikely to see public housing on this scale of such high quality again in the foreseeable future.

As the architect John Winter put it: 'Between the system building spree of the sixties and the late seventies slide into folksiness there was a magical moment for English housing when eminently habitable places of clarity and calm were designed and built ... Camden has contributed richly to this scene.'

Highgate New Town, Stage 1

1972–79, now called the Whittington Estate

Architect: Peter Tábori, assisted by Ken Adie, Camden Architect's Department

Structural engineers: Ove Arup and Partners

Main contractor: A.E. Symes Ltd, completed by Y.J. Lovell (London) Ltd

Original contract value: £2,484,630. *Final cost:* £9,037,634

Materials: Substructure of *in situ* concrete; superstructure of load-bearing crosswalls; external walls of sand-coloured concrete blocks and precast concrete (now mostly painted cream); all windows and joinery in stained timber (now painted brown)

Accommodation: 273 homes accommodating 1070 people, varying from one-bedroom two-person flats to six-bedroom eight-person houses. 268 underground car parking spaces

Background

The history of the redevelopment of this area, on the eastern edge of Camden, shows the changes in fashion in public housing from the mid sixties to the early eighties.

The first plans for a massive redevelopment scheme were proposed in 1966. The existing housing of mainly two- and three-storey terraces was then about a hundred years old and was seen as unsuitable for modern residential requirements. Seventy-five per cent had no bathroom and the existing network of streets, with no parking provision, was seen as obsolete. Refurbishment was not considered a solution. And

with the threat of compulsory purchase orders hanging over the area the properties were rapidly deteriorating. As the adjoining area in Islington was in a similar state it was thought that a joint project would save costs and in 1967 a team from Camden Architect's Department, led by Richard Gibson, worked with Islington's team to prepare a unified scheme of flats and shops. By the following year this had failed and the two boroughs went their separate ways. At the end of 1968 Richard Gibson left Camden and the project was taken over by the young Peter Tábori.

Design and construction

Peter Tábori was born in Hungary in 1942, studied at the Regent Street Polytechnic (his teachers included Neave Brown and Richard Rogers), and spent his two Private Practice years with fellow-Hungarian Ernő Goldfinger. He worked for Denys Lasdun from 1965–68 before joining Camden. Whilst a student he had asked the local authority for a diploma project and they had given him the brief for Highgate. Sydney Cook was so impressed by this work that he employed him to develop it into the final scheme.

As redesigned Stage 1 consisted of six straight parallel terraces, forming four pedestrian streets over underground car parks, with a green in the middle. Stage 2 to the south was to contain six further terraces with shops, library and a community centre. At over two hundred bed-spaces to the acre the new estate would be twice the density of the houses it replaced.

Construction began in June 1972 with an original completion date of November 1974. But there were problems with the precast concrete panels and a history of delays on the site. The main contractors, a company established at the end of the nineteenth century, were in financial difficulties and in October 1976 went into liquidation leaving the building unfinished. Squatters moved in and there was





vandalism. When new contractors were appointed they found that much of the original work was defective and had to be demolished and rebuilt. By the time Stage 1 was eventually completed in October 1979 the final cost was nearly four times the original estimates.

The site climbs Dartmouth Park Hill and is next to Highgate Cemetery. The design exploits this to the full. The terraces are of three and four storeys with a stepped section providing each flat and house with at least one private south-facing terrace or courtyard. But the changes in level are so ingeniously handled that all four storeys are rarely seen from inside the estate. All the flats have their own entrance, often approached by the staircases and bridges which are a distinctive part of the design.

Although each terrace has a standard bay they are broken up in different ways with diagonal routes between, so that each pedestrian street has its own distinctive character. Planting was an important part of the design, the intention being to create a visual continuation of the greenery from the cemetery. Light was designed to reach car park level at many points so that trees could rise from below. (The car parks for the lower terraces have now been bricked up as they had become dangerous because of cars being set on fire and other misuse.)

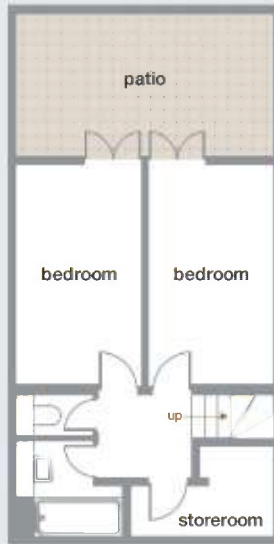
The concrete blocks and paving stones are a sand colour and the rougher aggregate of the terrace lintels contrasts with the smooth surface of the rest of the concrete.



Cover: Stoneleigh Terrace from Raydon Street

Left: Retcar Place

This page, top to bottom: Sandstone Place, Lulot Gardens, Sandstone Place and Stoneleigh Terrace



ground floor



first floor



Interior

8 Stoneleigh Terrace was designed as a four-person, two-bedroom maisonette. The interior planning, mainly by Ken Adie, shares many features with other Camden estates (especially Alexandra Road, which was designed and built at the same time):

- the walls are divided into panels by storey-height doors with stained timber frames
- spaces can be opened into each other by means of double doors (between the hall and the living/dining area) and a sliding partition (between the kitchen and the living/dining area)
- a fully-glazed wall, with heating concealed beneath a low wooden bench, separates the L-shaped living/dining area from the balcony
- the bedrooms are below the living area, are of equal size and open onto a patio

The internal window between the hall and the living area further dissolves the space (as well as providing borrowed light) and there is a large box room on the lower level.

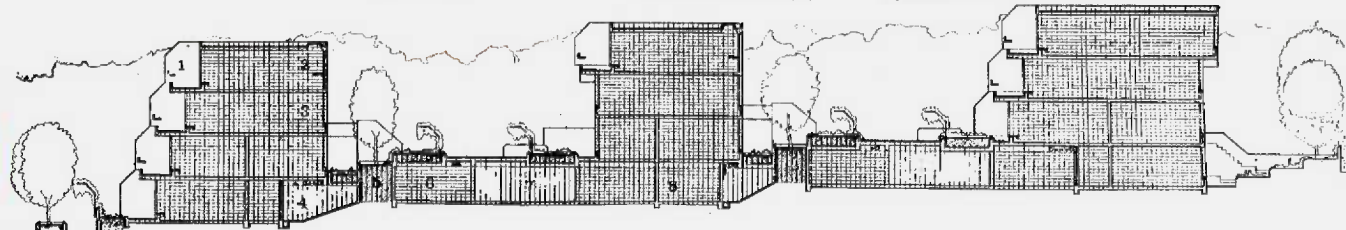
HOUSE SECTIONS

- 1, private open space
- 2, masonette
- 3, type A housing
- 4, service ducts
- 5, planting area

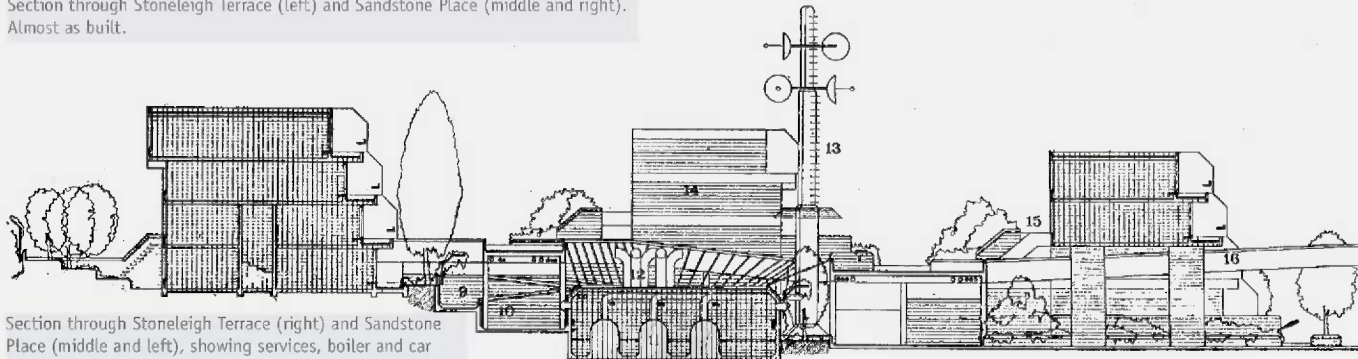
- 6, garages
- 7, route for cars
- 8, service and storage
- 9, service ramp
- 10, covered service/children's play

- 11, boiler house
- 12, play square
- 13, flue and aeriats
- 14, typical terrace
- 15, stairs to individual units

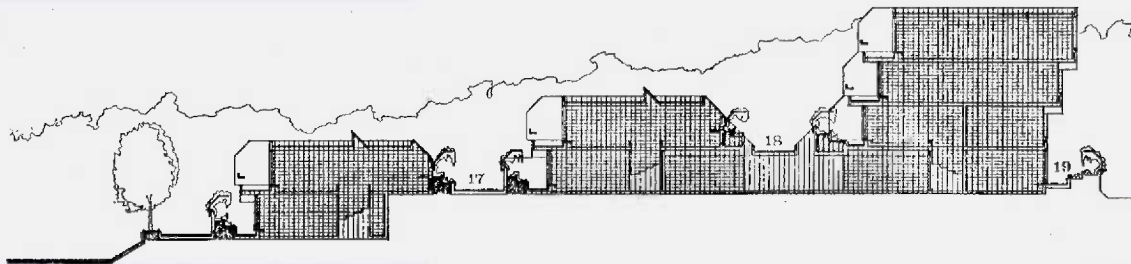
- 16, pedestrian link to phase II
- 17, pedestrian route
- 18, pedestrian deck over car's route
- 19, private patio



Section through Stoneleigh Terrace (left) and Sandstone Place (middle and right).
Almost as built.



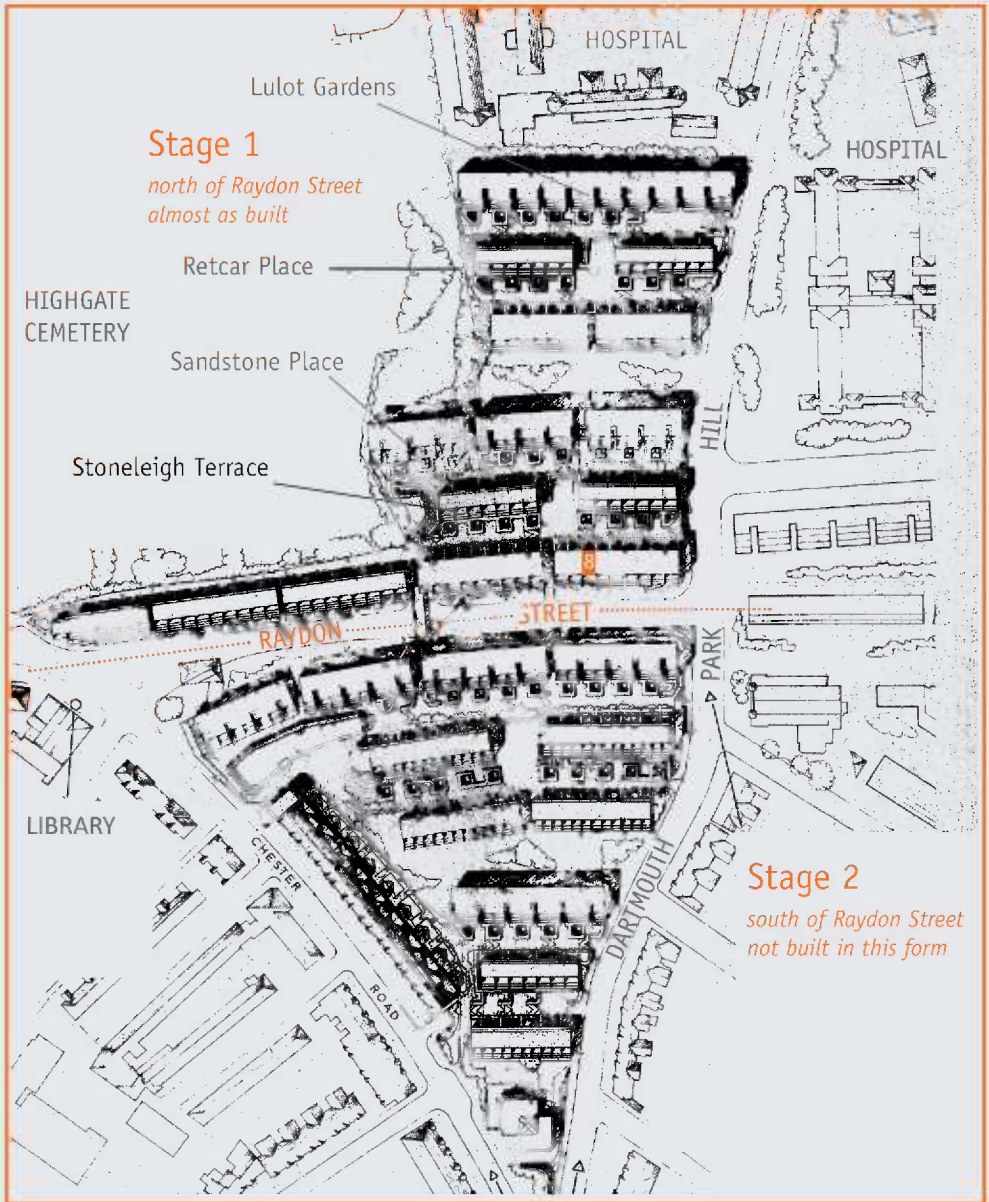
Section through Stoneleigh Terrace (right) and Sandstone Place (middle and left), showing services, boiler and car parking. Almost as built. Note bridge to Stage 2 (right), not constructed.



Section through southern three terraces of Stage 2. Not built.

scale 1:300

Peter Tábori's original scheme for Highgate New Town



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Thanks to Ian Dungavell for helping with the research for this brochure and for laying it out, and to Mark Osborne for the use of his photographs.

Highgate New Town, Stage 2, Sites A and B

Chester Road and Balmore Street, London N19, 1976–78

Architects: Bill Forrest and Oscar Palacio, Camden Architect's Department

Materials: reinforced concrete with prefabricated timber panels clad with white and coloured enamelled asbestos-cement sheets; buff tiles, timber windows and painted metal railings

Accommodation: 16 shops and 9 maisonettes (site A) and 8 maisonettes and 8 bedsitters (site B)

In the early seventies it was decided not to continue with Peter Tábori's design for the triangular site of Stage 2. Instead Bill Forrest and Oscar Palacio prepared a sleeker design of two straight terraces: shops and maisonettes on Chester Road and maisonettes and bedsits on Balmore Street. This was to be a pilot scheme for the rest of Stage 2.

The block on Chester Road (site A) was built first as there was an urgent need to replace the shops which had been on the original site. It was completed ahead of the nineteen-month contract period and under the contract amount. It has a stepped section of three storeys with an overhanging fourth floor. There are parades of shops on the ground and first floors with nine two-bedroom maisonettes on the second and third floors. Entrance to the maisonettes is by an access balcony at the rear above the service yard, which is wide enough to accommodate planters and seats. The use of coloured metalwork is particularly inventive and the design shows the influence of Elsfeld, the first of Bill Forrest's schemes for Camden, completed in 1970.

Inside there is fine stained-timber detailing and skylights allow natural light into the stairs and bathrooms. As in Stage I the living rooms have a glass wall opening onto a large balcony, and can be separated from the kitchen/dining area by a folding partition.

The *Architects' Journal* liked the terraces:

The scheme is visually decorative with colour playing an important role. Both white and terracotta asbestos is used, doors on upper levels are yellow, battens are natural timber and the steelwork and stained timber slats are bright blue. Combined with the crispness of the detailing, this seems to provide a richness of texture and form similar to that of the Victorian street; albeit in a different language. Finishes are of a higher standard than that normally associated with yard-stick housing.

The terraces were also reviewed and praised in the main architectural journals of France (*L'architecture d'aujourd'hui*) and Japan (*Toshi-Jutaku*, which devoted eight pages to them).

The second terrace (site B) is of three floors with the short-stay bedsits, entered from the service yard, exploiting the slope by being tucked in beneath the maisonettes. It was begun in 1977 and completed in 1978.

Sadly for blocks where the use of colour was such an important part of their design, neither has been redecorated since completion. Camden is currently (September 2010) proposing to demolish these two blocks and redevelop the site with a mixture of public and private housing.



Highgate New Town, Stage 2, Site C

Raydon Street and Dartmouth Park Hill, London N19, 1978–1981

Architects: Bill Forrest and Oscar Palacio, Camden Architect's Department

Materials: load-bearing cavity walls; pitched roofs with trussed rafters; yellow brick with red brick banding; stained timber windows and fences; painted concrete planters; galvanised steel balconies

Accommodation: 72 one-bedroom two-person flats, 9 two-bedroom three-person flats, 14 two-storey four-person houses, 12 two-storey five-person houses

Awards: Architectural Design Project Award Commendation 1981; Civic Trust Award 1983

By the mid seventies public opinion was starting to revolt against any form of modern architecture for housing. There was a growing disenchantment with schemes which separated pedestrians and cars and which integrated each flat into a monumental whole, separated from the world around it. In 1975 the Department of the Environment had issued a non-statutory recommendation that all family dwellings should be entered at ground level and have gardens.

So in 1976, partly as a result of community action, Camden Council decided not to continue with the style of the pilot scheme for the rest of the Highgate New Town site. Instead they decided to refurbish half the houses intended for demolition and for the new buildings specified something close to the very Victorian houses they had demolished only a few years earlier: brick walls (even specifying brown brick which the architects managed to change to yellow) and pitched roofs. Following the Greater London Development Plan lower density policy the new buildings would house fewer people than the houses they were replacing. The contract was put out for tender in 1977 and construction began in 1978 and took three years. The cost was about £1,500,000.

The long three-storey block containing the flats curves along Dartmouth Park Hill, matching the height of the houses opposite. It is divided into pairs of 'villas' by projecting staircases and the lines of the original roads are kept as pedestrian ways under a continuous roof. The terraces of houses are tucked in behind the block of flats or along Raydon Street and the well-designed public spaces are treated as small incidents along the routes through the scheme.

As in the earlier parts of Stage 2, the interior planning is more straightforward than in Camden's earlier estates, and although the balconies are pretty they have no privacy and are much too small to be used as outdoor rooms like those of Stage 1.

It is indicative of the changes in fashion that this scheme provoked a flurry of discussion and debate (and not only in the architectural press — it was featured in the *Observer* colour supplement in April 1981) and received two awards whereas the completion of Stage 1 seems to have been largely ignored.

