



Modernism in Oakwood

Text by Richard Stones, photographs by Andrew Lack

A self-guided walk around some of the more distinguished public buildings of the 1930s designed for this new suburb. Refer to the map below for the route and the points of interest described in the text. Allow 1 hour. Oakwood is served by buses from Palmers Green, Southgate, Barnet and Enfield Town.

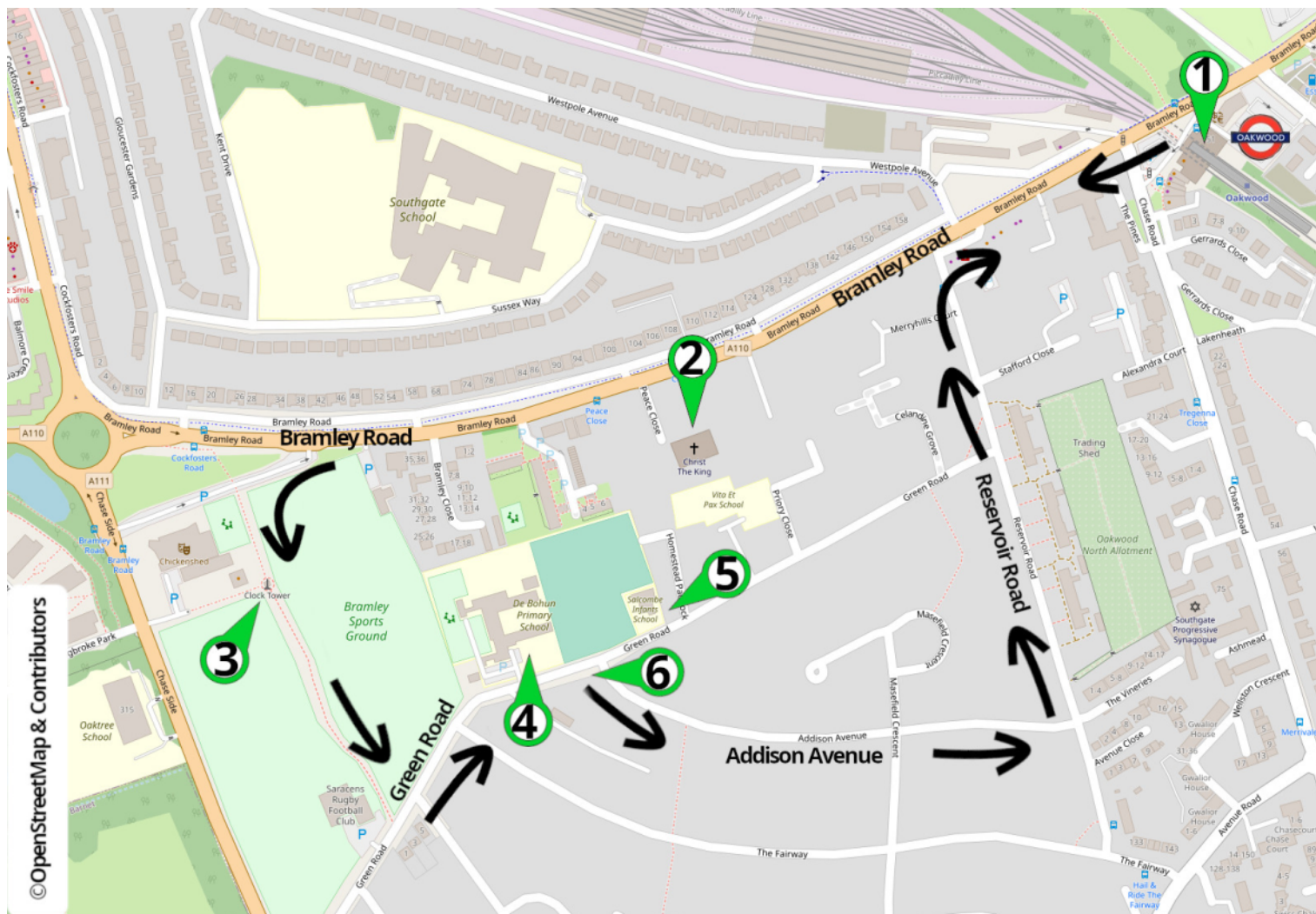
At the beginning of the twentieth century the area north of Southgate village was still largely rural, though with a scattering of dwellings along the roads linking Enfield, Southgate and Barnet. This began to change after the First World War when Southgate Urban District Council acquired land in the area for an estate of municipal "houses fit for heroes". Change was accelerated with the extension of the Piccadilly Line north from Finsbury Park, reaching what is now Oakwood Station in 1933. The destination of the extension seems to have been determined as much by the need to reach a flat open area for a depot (the entrance can be seen across the road from Oakwood Station) as by any plan to urbanise the Oakwood area, but development naturally followed.

Until the coming of the tube Oakwood did not even have a name. The station was originally called "Enfield West", but its distance from Enfield Town was felt to make this misleading. In 1926 Southgate Council had bought the country estate of Oak Lodge, to the east of the station, to create a new public park which was named "Oakwood Park" after the oak woods which it contained. At the Council's suggestion "Oakwood" was added as a suffix to the station name in 1934. "Enfield West" was finally dropped in 1946, by which time the neighbourhood's identity as Oakwood had been established.

Start at the Grade II* **Oakwood Tube Station (1)**.



From the early 1920s the architect Charles Holden (1875–1960) worked closely with the Managing Director of the Underground, Frank Pick, to develop a distinctive architectural style for its buildings. Holden championed "an unadorned style based on simplified forms and massing that was free of what he considered to be unnecessary decorative detailing" [Wikipedia]. His attention to detail extended to the design of all the fittings of the buildings concerned.



Pick insisted that Holden be in charge of the design of the new stations on the extension of the Piccadilly Line. The stations “were of great importance for introducing rational modern design based on continental models to a wider public and for imposing a brand image to buildings and design when this was still novel” (Historic England). The amount of work involved meant that Holden had to involve other architects, and the station’s detailed design was in the hands of C H James (1893-1953). The design is nonetheless what Pick termed “Holdenesque”. It is dominated by what Holden called a “brick box with a concrete lid”, rising above lower ranges accommodating offices and other station functions: “a bold and elegantly proportioned variant of the Sudbury Town ‘box’ prototype providing both an effective landmark and impressively grand interior space”. [Historic England].

The interior retains many original features including the station clock; black glazed bricks used at ground level; a glass “passimeter” ticket booth which allowed tickets to be issued from both sides—the latest crowd management feature of the time; a small glazed shop (now a taxi office) accessible from inside and outside the building; and an oval confectionery kiosk.

The concrete canopy over the platforms was designed by Stanley Heaps, the Underground’s architect.

As you leave the station, note the elegant lamp standard



(separately Grade II listed) (left) which combines lighting, a prominent display of the famous Under-ground roundel

—in its early Frank Pick form—and covered seats at the bottom. The perimeter wall of the station forecourt was originally surmounted by a decorative dog-tooth rail: only fragments of this remain.

Make your way across the station forecourt to the

traffic lights at the junction of Bramley Road and Chase Road. (This junction predates the station and the suburb: Bramley Road is the old road leading from Enfield to Barnet and Chase Road is a branch to Southgate.) Cross Chase Road and walk westwards along Bramley Road. Continue past the junction with Reservoir Road (another old road). After about 500 yards on the left you will see The Church of **Christ the King** (not listed) (2)

The monastery complex you see was the brainchild of Dom Constantine Bosschaerts (1895-1950), a Benedictine monk from Belgium who was an associate of Cardinal Angelo Roncalli (later Pope John XXIII) and the founder of Vita et Pax Foundation, an organisation which was intended to promote Christian unity. In 1922 Dom Bosschaerts decided to bring the organisation to the UK and he eventually established a branch at this site. Having trained as an architect before becoming a monk, he designed the complex himself. Only a small part of his plan was accomplished. The present “austerely modern” church, which dates from 1940, was intended to become a parish hall on the completion of a much larger church behind it. This never happened, but building work continued over many years, with a small new monastery

building, linked by an arch to the original buildings, being completed in 1995.

The Benedictines left the complex in 2012, but another religious order, Chemin Neuf, has replaced them. The heritage of the Vita et Pax Foundation continues in the Vita et Pax Preparatory School, which operates from the site.



The church building can be entered, if it is open, by a door at the far left of the side of the church which faces you.

Return to Bramley Road and continue along it. Set back in trees on the left are blocks of municipal flats in dark brick: these were built after by Southgate Council after the Second World War—a commemorative plaque on the end of the block on the left is dated 17 September 1949. A little further on, on the left, is De Bohun House, originally the farmhouse of Bohun farm, which continued in business as a “model” dairy farm until the 1920s. (The name is a reminder of the De Bohun family, Earls of Hereford, who were Lords of the Manor of Enfield for a period in the middle ages.)

At this point the modern road curves to the right: the old course of the road survives on the left as a lay-by. Follow the old road until you come to a gap in the hedge on the left. Go through the gap, which brings you into Bramley Sports Ground, established in the 1930s as a recreation area for the nearby council housing. On your right are utilitarian brick buildings which housed a shooting range (now indoor bowls) and squash courts (now a soft play centre and café). At the far corner near the roundabout is a theatre complex built in 1994 for the Chickenshed Theatre Company. Ahead of you is the Grade II listed **Clock Tower** (3)



The central focus of the recreation area is the clock tower, built in 1936. Its structure has been repaired in the last few years, but unfortunately its clock does not work. According to the listing details, the original installation included a clock mechanism by J. Smith & Sons of Derby and 5 bells cast by Taylors of Loughborough, which played “Boys and girls come out to play”.

Continue southwards along the path across the sports ground. The rugby pitches and stand on the right were the home of Saracens Football Club from 1939 to the 1990s and are still the base of Saracens Amateur RFC. Further to your right across Chase Side are woods which form part of the estate of Oak Hill House, an eighteenth century mansion which was bequeathed by Charles Baring Young in 1928 to form a theological college.

Continue along the path till you reach the gate into Green Road. Turn left into Green Road, which curves to the right and you will see **De Bohun Primary School** (4) (listed Grade II), built in 1936, and beyond it **De Bohun Library and Clinic** (5) also listed Grade II, built in 1938-9, now Salcombe Preparatory School.

In the 1930s Middlesex County Council, rather than Southgate Council, was responsible for education and libraries in Southgate, so both buildings were designed by W T Curtis (b. 1879) and H W Burchett (1863–1960) of the MCC architects department. Curtis was the Chief Architect for the MCC from 1930–46, and Burchett was the Assistant Architect for educational buildings. According

to addition of emphatically vertical staircase towers. In this their style was influenced by the Dutch modernist architect Willem Dudok (1884–1974), himself a municipal architect in the city of Hilversum.

Note the art deco iron gates in front of the Library.

Opposite these buildings, at the corner of Green Road and Addison Avenue is a final public building for the new suburb: **Addison House** (6), built by Southgate Council in 1935 as a community centre for the surrounding municipal housing. Its Arts and Crafts style could hardly



be a greater contrast with the modernism of the school and library opposite.

Continue the walk along Addison Avenue, a street of 1920s Southgate Council houses, many of them little altered externally. At the end of the street, turn left up Reservoir Road to return to Bramley Road and Oakwood Station. The housing in Reservoir Road is post-Second World War: the blocks of flats on the right were built around 1949. The northernmost block carries the borough coat of arms: the development was clearly the flagship of the Council’s post-war housing campaign. Beyond the flats note a pair of older semi-detached houses (now a dentist’s surgery)—these are survivors of the straggle of housing which extended from Southgate to here before the development of Oakwood as a suburb.

Further reading

Bridget Cherry and Nikolaus Pevsner, *Buildings of England: London 4 North* (1998)

Graham Dalling, *Southgate and Edmonton Past* (1994)

Alan Dumayne, *Southgate—a Glimpse into the Past* (1987)

Stephen Gilbert, *1930s Public Buildings in Southgate*, *Enfield Society News* no 212

Historic England; listing details

Heritage Information at Oakwood Station

Online resources

Wikipedia: entries on the architects and sites mentioned

London Transport Museum: material on Charles Holden

Modernism in Metroland

Saracens Football Club

Taking Stock—Catholic Churches of England and Wales

About The Enfield Society

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to website *Modernism in Metroland*, together they were responsible for numerous public buildings across north and west London (including Bowes Road Library and Arnos Pool in Southgate). According to *Modernism in Metroland*, their modernist utilitarian style owed as much to economics as aesthetics: financial stringencies in the 1930s pushed them towards the use, eg, of steel frames and concrete slab floors. These methods tended to create a horizontal emphasis in their buildings, with strings of low windows, which they balanced (as here) by the