

HERNE HILL ART DECO

A walk around Herne Hill's Art Deco enclave between Herne Hill and Dorchester Drive



The Quadrangle, 1911-26
Architect – Edward A Ellis

A development of mock Tudor flats, built around, and accessed from a quadrangle -as the name suggests. Funded by local landowner, R A Sanders, and built by a charitable foundation, the South London Provident Society, as homes for single women over 35. Tenants had to be civil servants, teachers, lecturers or retired from the professions. The flats had kitchens and toilets but no bathrooms - there were communal bathrooms and a laundry. The first twenty flats faced Herne Hill and had a resident warden. The room above the main archway was for visitors as none were allowed into the flats. Modernised in 1960; the whole development was sold off in the 1980s and has recently been acquired by the Lexadon Property Group.



The Quadrangle 1915



Dorchester House 1934-36
Listed Grade II
Architects – Kemp & Tasker

Dorchester House is a large detached house with a billiard room and double garage. It was built in red brick with a roof terrace and quirky green tiled parapets. The interior is particularly fine and includes an exceptional en-suite bathroom lined with champagne pink mirrors and sporting an onyx wash hand basin. The bedroom fireplace sports internal illumination operated by a floor button.

Both Dorchester House and the nearby Tudor Stacks (on the other side of Dorchester Court and now demolished) were built by builders C & J Morrell. Dorchester House was planned to be Cyril Morrell's own house while Dorchester Court was built for his mother. Neither house was ever occupied by them as the company went bankrupt in late 1936.





32 Herne Hill, 1936-37
Architects – Keller & Kompfner

The house was built in 1936-37 to the designs of two Austrian architects, Rudi Kompfner was a family friend of the owner, Roy Mowgli Franey, and his German wife. He ran a building firm Almond Franey & Sons and Kompfner was worked for him between 1937-41. The house cost £1800 to build. Subsequently altered and extended, the second floor is an extension built in the 1980s.



10 Dorchester Drive, 1935-36
Listed Grade II
Architects – Kemp & Tasker

This as a well-preserved and relatively early example of a modern movement house marketed towards adventurous clients as an affordable way to obtain a modern lifestyle. It is one of only two built versions known to exist in England of the competition-winning design for the 1934 Ideal Home Exhibition – see picture below



Kemp and Tasker's modern house design was exhibited in the 'Village of Tomorrow' after they won a competition to design an 'ideal home' the previous year. The Ideal Home Exhibition brochure advertised the house as a structure that could be built to order in any part of the country with the option for clients to customise aspects of the design to meet their individual requirements, and described its appearance as one of 'dignified simplicity'. Notable features of the design included: a large, semi-circular bay window to the 'sun-lounge'; a sunbathing terrace; a labour-saving kitchen; a 'luxurious' bathroom with a separate shower; and a flexible plan that allowed for the lounge and dining room to be opened out into one room 40ft long for entertaining, which could be fitted with speakers connected to the wireless radio at both ends.



8 Dorchester Drive, 1936
Architect – John D M Harvey

The only house in the road not designed by Kemp & Tasker and another interpretation of art deco styling. Photographs of the original interiors are in the RIBA Library.



Dorchester Court 1934-36
Listed Grade II
Architects – Kemp & Tasker
Builder – Morrell (Builders) Ltd

A total of 96 flats were arranged in eight blocks, two L-shaped blocks either side of the entrance road at both ends of the site, and two pairs of two blocks facing each other across the landscaped garden that included a circular fountain and lawns. The blocks were four storeys high with a concrete frame and clad in red brick with 'moderne' detailing and flat roofs. Communal entrance halls retain numerous original features.

The flats were generously laid out, with eight flats per block arranged either side of a lift with double doors. Their interiors, in the rare cases where original features remain, are arguably their strongest point, with what the listing call 'unusual detailing' in period design.

Every detail is well considered, a modest realisation of the modernist emphasis on total design. Deco curves on the skirting boards and coving, plain sliding doors between dining- and drawing-rooms, portholes in the kitchen and dining-room door, a drop-down serving-hatch and dumb-waiter, deco taps and basins, green tiles edged with narrow rounded black ones, square chrome light-switch panels, a simple travertine marble fireplace with notched corners and black and white tiles as a hearth, and the internal impact of those long horizontal Crittal windows, a plain front door with combed faux-walnut effect, all combine to give a thorough period feel. The District Heating system, in which it is said Kemp was something of a pioneer and expert (perhaps due to his Cinema experience), provided hot water and central heating as part of the service-charge.

Morrell's, builders

Cyril and Stanley Morrell were born in Harpenden Road, Streatham in 1908. Their father, Herbert Charles Morrell (1876-1921). Originally a carpenter, he had enlisted in the Royal Engineers in December 1897 under a "Short Service" agreement (up to 12 years) On his marriage certificate, dated 16 March 1907, he was described as a "builder", and he gave his address as 23 Gipsy Hill, West Norwood.

Herbert Charles Morrell expanded his business into Herne Hill, and in 1915-16 build two pairs of semi-detached houses at Nos 200-202 Herne Hill. Around 1930, his two sons Cyril and Stanley set up their business, they were 22 at the time. They were later joined by their younger brother, Frank. At first the trio operated as C & H Morrell from Herne Hill but in 1932 they changed the firm's name to Morrell (Builders) Ltd and the next year set up an HQ in Bromley High Street Although young, the brothers were very entrepreneurial and could see the demand for housing in the outer London suburbs. Between 1932 and 1935 Morrell (Builders) Ltd purchased large areas of farmland in Petts Wood, Coney Hall, West Wickham and Chelsfield, along with several sites in Bromley, Shortlands, Southborough, Hayes, and Orpington.

In 1935 the brothers floated the company on the Stock Exchange. The plan was to raise £150,000 of new money to build shops on their estates, the rents providing funds to finance further building. However, the flotation was a flop and before long Morrell (Builders) was in severe financial difficulties – exacerbated by the infamous 'mortgage strike' by purchasers of some of their houses in Coney Hall. The houses had many constructional faults and one couple, Elsy & Jim Borders, began withholding their mortgage repayments. The building society, The Bradford, sought to repossess the house but the Borders replied with a counterclaim for £500 to cover the cost of repairs they said they had had to carry out. The claim went to court and was followed by considerable adverse publicity for Morrell's. In the end the Borders had to pay up but the builder went bankrupt.

