

Woolwich Town Centre Architecture Walk

Proposed Route

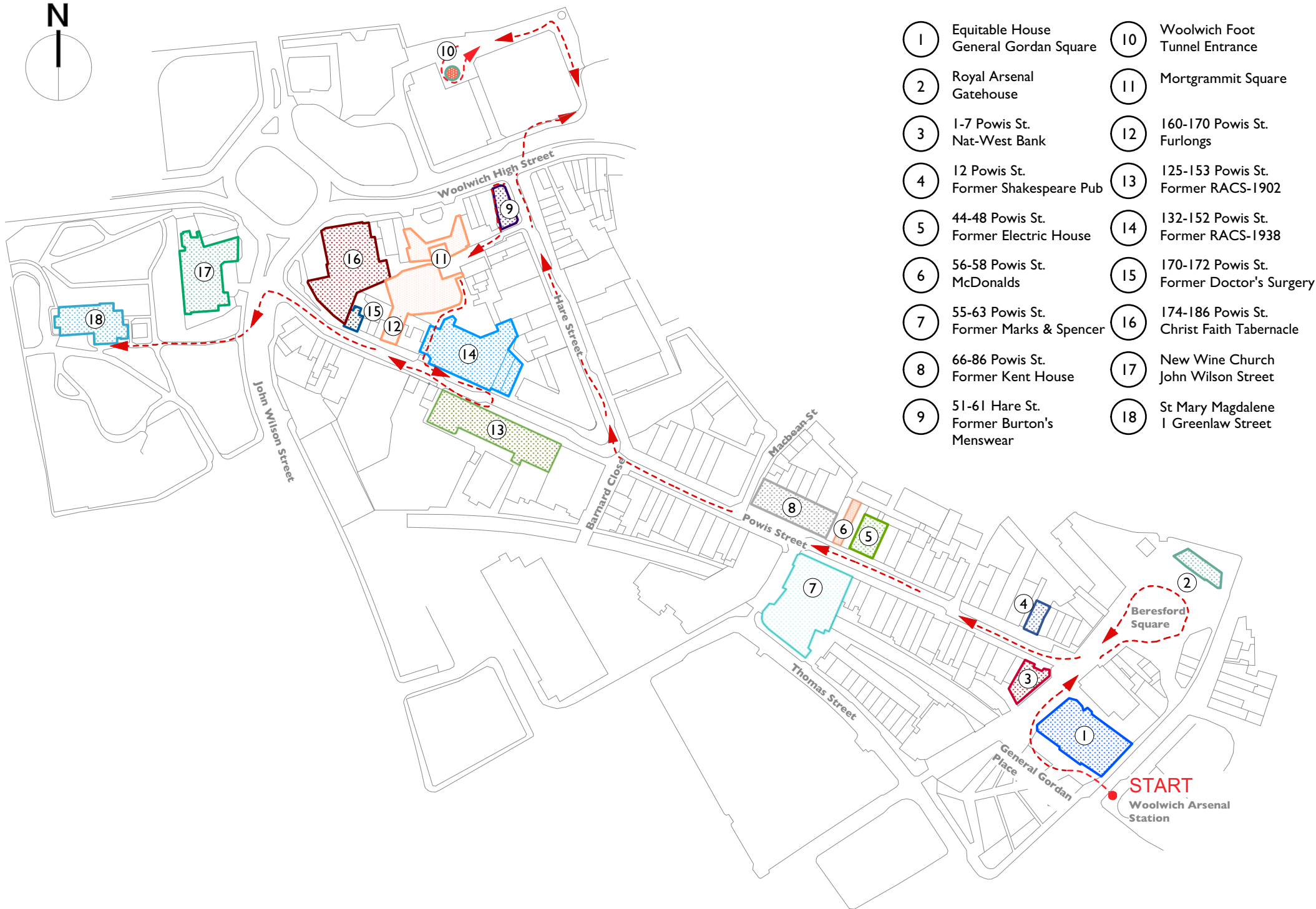
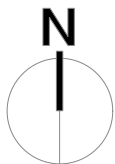
This document suggests a proposed route for Woolwich Ambassadors to lead a walk around some of the buildings of architectural significance in the Heritage Action Zone, Woolwich. Indicative notes are included and also a Further Reading list for more detailed information.



Hi!



● **Our Hut**



Map Reference	Name/address of building	Image	Background/History	To Point Out
1	Equitable House. The Former HQ of Equitable building Society: General Gordon Square		Start at Equitable House in General Gordon Square. Woolwich Equitable started as a local co-operative building society and became one of the biggest in the country, hence the grand headquarters. The Equitable was one of the first societies to finance home ownership through savings. Although Pevsner said it is unmissable on a tour of Woolwich he also called it 'solid and stodgy in a stone-faced Baroque Moderne'! It was built by Grace & Farmer in 1932-5 with a steel frame and luxury materials.	Point out Portland stone facing on the three public sides. The central tower has a copper roof while the mansard roof is of slate. Point out the owl above the side entrance and ornate doors.
2	Royal Arsenal Gatehouse also known as Beresford Gate: Beresford Square	 Arsenal Main Gates, Woolwich, 1915 Although Royal Arsenal is famous as a munitions factory, it began life as Woolwich Vicars – originally a village where in the eastern grounds of a Tudor house named Tower Place – and was used for the printing of guns. The Board of Ordnance purchased the lands in 1713 to house a large storage depot. From 1816, when the Laboratory was relocated from Greenwich, ammunition was made here. Above, workers stream from the main gates onto Beresford Square, a quarter proper since the factory was demolished. 	Walk across Beresford Square to the Grade II Listed Royal Arsenal Gatehouse which was the main entrance to the Arsenal, used at its height by thousands of people every day. However, since the factory closed and the A206 was widened in the 1980s it was cut off from the Arsenal and now is stranded on the North of the square. The gatehouse was built in stages, first erected as a single storey in 1828, to the designs of Colonel John Thomas Jones commissioned by the Master-General of the Ordnance, William Carr Beresford and later added to with the superstructure being completed in 1891.	The first floor includes three windows on each side and a clock in the middle. It was built in red brick contrasting with the yellow stocks of the earlier part.

3

Nos. 1-7 Powis Street: NatWest Bank



Head to Powis Street and explain that the street was laid out by the Powis brothers who bought the lease to what was then fields with a very few buildings in 1782. (See Sandby picture below, painted in 1783.) Since first developed the street has been through many changes. At the corner of Powis Street and Green's End is the NatWest bank in a building from 1958-60. This site has been occupied by a succession of buildings from the beginning of construction of Powis Street – firstly by a Presbyterian Church built 1799-1800. This was redeveloped around 1850 as William Reed's drapers shop and the Powis Arms beerhouse. The first bank here, the London, City and Midland Bank was established in 1906. The current building was designed by Hector Hamilton (who had been a winner in the Soviet Union's design competition for a Palace of Soviets) for a smart furnishing company, Easterns Ltd. It was converted to a NatWest bank in 1987-8.

The building has a concrete frame and a concrete pavement canopy separates the ground and first floors. Glass curtain walls with imitation-stone mullions and vitreous enamel spandrels wrap around the upper floors, with a diamond-patterned decorative inverted corner at the meeting of Powis Street and Green's End.

4

No. 12 Powis Street:
Former Shakespeare
Pub



Built in 1890-1 by HH Church, a local architect who did a lot of work in Powis Street, it was originally a smart hotel and public house. This building replaced the earlier pub built in 1807 by the Powis Brothers which was probably named after Shakespeare owing to being next door to a theatre. The theatre only lasted until 1820 and the site was later developed for shop use.

Apart from the ground floor, No. 12 is fairly intact but stopped being a pub around 1990 and now has flats above the amusement arcade. Point out grandeur of the building with granite columns, oriel windows and bust of Shakespeare on pediment with imp or monkey above.

5

Nos. 44-48 Powis
Street: Former
Electric House



Unusual 1935-6 building in this context – designed by H.W Tee and Frederick Elliott in a classical style with a brief from the borough's electricity department that it should stand out to attract the local population and it became known as 'London's wonder showroom.' It displayed many new electrical appliances and cooking demonstrations took place on the top floor. The basement was also used as a showroom up until the 1990's

Ground floor now altered by JD Sports but first and second floors retain many original features – the cream faience, pilasters holding up the cornice and segmental pediment and the bronze Crittal windows. Internal staircase lined in Travertine can still be seen. Sadly, the original shop window, the bronze clock and the neon fascia are no longer there.

6

Nos. 56 -58 Powis Street:
McDonalds



The first McDonalds in Britain - opened in 1974. That McDonalds chose this as the place to open their first restaurant in the country demonstrates the importance Powis Street had as a commercial centre.

7

Nos.55-63 Powis Street: Former Marks and Spencer.



Look over the street to Poundland at 55-63. This was until recently Marks & Spencer and was built by them in 1934-5, designed by their consultant architect, Robert Lutyens, son of Edwin Lutyens. It was built as one of their 'Super-stores' and was originally 5 bays, extended to 9 bays in matching style in 1960-61. Another extension on Thomas Street was added in 1964-5 with a brick frontage.

The artificial stone cladding, steel window frames and decorative ironwork grilles on second floor windows remain.

8

Nos. 68-86 Powis Street: Former Kent House



Walk west down Powis Street to Nos 68-86, Kent House, which retains the name from a previous era when Woolwich was part of Kent. This incarnation was built as Garretts drapers emporium over two phases, 1892-3 and then the eastern end added 1898-9. The architect, H.H. Church, designed many of the late Victorian buildings in the street and this is one of most important survivors from that time. Originally selling furniture and cloth goods to wives of army officers, with a large dining room, workshops and staff quarters, it was a smart shopping destination. Further changes were made in 1964 before it finally succumbed to the economic downturn and closed in 1972.

Mention that the roofline reflects how most of the street would have looked in 1900 and point out the stucco decoration and the Invicta Horse of Kent on the middle gable – the horse is the ancient symbol of Kent.

9

Nos.51-61 Hare Street: Former Burton's Menswear



Walk on to meet Hare Street and look at 51-61 Hare Street. Now a restaurant it was originally Burton's first purpose-built menswear store, built in 1929, designed by Burton's in-house architect, Harry Wilson.

Most of the original shopfront survives – point out the elegant wooden mullions, black granite and the remaining curved glass. The first floor may have been a billiard hall and is now a club – many of Burton's stores had billiard halls attached to encourage trade. Notice the faience and Egyptian style details - window jambs and lotus and palmette motifs in white faience on parapet entablature, also the low level naming stone in Mortgrammit Square.

10

Woolwich Foot
Tunnel entrance



Walk down to the river to demonstrate how close it is to the town and explain that it has always been very important to Woolwich where the Royal Dockyards were established at the beginning of the C16 carrying on until the mid C19. The Woolwich foot tunnel, designed by Maurice Fitzmaurice, opened in 1912 allowing pedestrians to pass under the Thames from Woolwich to North Woolwich. It is 504m long and is entered through the elegant circular pavilions at either end. These buildings are Grade II Listed.

Indicate the fine red brickwork, stone cornicing and decorative metalwork on the windows. The roof is conical with circular part glazed, part copper roof and ventilating lantern above.

11

Furlongs Garage and Mortgramit Square



Walk through Furlongs garage forecourt noticing the original signs and into Mortgramit Square. Follow passageway to the back of Furlongs showroom to see the adjoined multi-storey car park and workshop. Built 1938-9 for Furlongs. Furlongs had been a Woolwich-based firm since 1812, established as cabinet makers, and had other shops such as a furniture store further along Powis Street. Very important as a rare survivor of a motoring complex from the early days of private car ownership. Built in the modernist industrial style it underlines the importance of Woolwich as a forward looking industrial centre at that time. It provided every service car owners needed as well as parking for the contemporary adjacent cinema. A filling station forecourt was added with a high street frontage in the 1950s.

Notice the four-storey red brick ramped garage and how it is linked to the workshop by a bridge over the square. The workshop is also internally linked to the former showroom on Powis Street. This complex is cleverly orientated behind the showroom so as not to have an intrusive presence on Powis Street. Point out the original Crittall windows some of which are curved and the use of different brickwork

12

Nos. 160-170
Powis Street:
Furlongs
Showroom



The façade of Furlongs built in 1938-9 in Art Deco style and clad in beige faience tiles.

Decorative elements are typical of 1930s Art Deco style. This was the showroom where cars were displayed and was the Powis Street face to the large complex behind. It is the most decorative part - designed to attract attention.

13

Nos. 125-153
Powis Street:
Former Royal
Arsenal Co-
operative Stores
(RACS) HQ

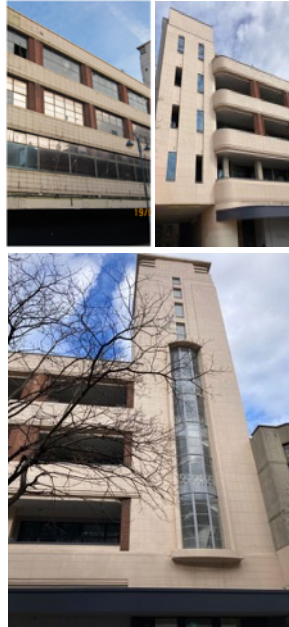


The Royal Arsenal Co-operative Stores was a hugely important organisation in Woolwich, started by Arsenal engineering workers William Rose and Alexander McLeod in 1868, when times were hard, under the name Royal Arsenal Supply Association. It started life in Rose's house but then moved a couple of times, became extremely successful and adopted a profit-sharing model where members got dividends. McLeod, now secretary, changed the name to the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Stores Limited and it was the most successful co-operative society in the South-east. Bigger premises were required and the large red-brick building on the South side of Powis Street was planned, designed by Frank Bethell. The first part was finished in 1903 complete with the statue of McLeod in the central niche, but sadly he didn't live to see it. Additions were made in 1926. Now a Travelodge.

Point out the highly decorative Italian Renaissance style, red brick and faience decoration, statue of Alexander McLeod and the copper-clad clocktower,

14

Nos. 132-152
Powis Street:
Former Royal
Arsenal Co-
operative Stores
(RACS)



The continuing success of RACS led to the building in 1938 of the Art Deco building designed by SW Ackroyd. Now converted to The Emporium Flats and the windows have been recessed.

Note typical Art Deco features - horizontals contrasting with vertical towers, cantilevered canopy, inspired by similar from the continent. Faience tiles with some red brick and staircases with Co-op metalwork design, visible through tower windows.

15

Nos. 170-172
Powis Street:
Former Doctor's
house/surgery



Built as a doctor's house and surgery for Dr James Tees, in 1898-9 by local architect H.H. Church. It replaces an earlier building of 1798, as shown in the rare double date stone on the building. The earlier date on the stone is important as it refers to the start of building work in Powis Street and this was originally the location of Number 1.

Also good to mention, with regard to the later building, is that purpose-built doctor's houses/surgeries were unusual, particularly in the otherwise commercial setting

16

Nos.174-186
Powis Street:
Former Granada
Cinema, now
Christ Faith
Tabernacle
Cathedral



Designed by Cecil Masey and Reginald Harold Uren in 1937-8. It also has an amazing interior including a hall of mirrors by Theodore Komisarjevsky.

Contrasting with the light colour of the Odeon, the Granada has a brick exterior with a curved front onto Powis Street and a tower which works with the towers of both RACS buildings to make a focal point of this end of the street. Both cinemas are huge as film was such an important form of entertainment in the 1930s.

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New Wine
Church, John
Wilson Street:
Former Odeon
Cinema



Built in 1937, The Odeon Cinema was designed by George Coles in the Art Deco 'Odeon style.'

Point out the curves and strong horizontals - inspired by contemporary car design with a futuristic look. Blank walls covered in cream faience tiles. Note both cinemas were built in the same year.

18

No.1 Greenlaw
Street: St Mary
Magdalene Church



Good high position with views over Woolwich and river. Grade II* Listed – original church built in 1730s with rebuilding of east end in 1890s and some C20 modifications.

Take the path to north of the church overlooking the Thames. This will illustrate the importance of the church to navigation and its views out to Thamesmead. The pathway will also enable walkers to view the monument to Tom Cribb (a lion) in the churchyard. Talk about the connection with North Woolwich, its railway terminus and the Woolwich Ferry which has a Royal Charter.

Further Reading Suggestions for Woolwich Ambassadors

Woolwich Conservation Area Appraisal – February 2022

https://853.london/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/woolwich_ca.pdf

Woolwich Town Centre Heritage Study

<https://853blog.files.wordpress.com/2019/01/woolwich-heritage-study-december-2018.pdf>

Woolwich Through Time

by Kristina Bedford

London Picture Archive

<https://www.londonpicturearchive.org>

The Survey of London

Woolwich – Chapter 4

<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/architecture/research/survey-of-london/woolwich>

