Highgate Hill Historical Walk

The traditional custodians of the land that this walk covers are the Jagera and Turrbul people. The area is thought to have been called Bennung-urrung after the frilly necked lizard, which can still be seen occasionally in neighbourhood backyards. It was a place of hunting where possums, squirrel gliders and wallabies were found.

Highgate Hill is, well, hilly and there is some climbing involved in this walk. The total ascent and descent is 72 metres with a few short steep sections. The total distance covered is around 5 and a half kilometres and could be expected to take around 1 ½ to 2 hours to cover. Of course, you can start and finish wherever you please. Also, some of our roads are quite busy and care must be taken in crossing them.

Paragraph numbers refer to locations shown on the route map at the end of the guide. I’ve also created a GPS map and description on Wikiloc at this address.

https://www.wikiloc.com/walking-trails/highgate-hill-history-walk-54155644

1. **The walk starts at Highgate Hill Park**, located 64 metres above sea level and the highest point of the suburb. This spot was a popular lookout long before the South Brisbane Town Council purchased the land for £1,250 in 1903. The shelter was built in 1911.

   An early surviving house, though now heavily modified, is that built by the Wilson family around 1864. It’s located at the back right side of the park, at number 15 Bellevue Street.

   ![Looking down Dornoch Terrace from the park during the 1893 flood. (State Library of Queensland)](image)

2. From here, **we head down Hampstead Road**, which may have been the route of an Aboriginal pathway to the Goodna District. A bora ring was located near the corner of Baynes Street.

   We pass several buildings which once served as shops, including the tiny house at the corner of Julia Street. Across the street are two other shops established in the early 1890s, now professional offices incorporated into a modern development. One was a butcher shop and was the location of Highgate Hill’s first public telephone in 1910. There’s still a public phone outside the shop.

   The other was a grocery shop. In the 1920s it was run by the Larcombe family.
Neighbourhood children looked forward to the free twist of boiled lollies the grocery delivery man brought with him every week.

Looking down Hampstead Road ca 1915 (Fryer Library)

3. We take a short detour down Blakeney Street, named after William Theophilus and Eliza Blakeney who built the house “Cooltigue” off Gladstone Road on over 7 acres of land in 1862. It no longer exists, but we can admire “Tarong”, originally known as “Rochemont”, at number 18. We are looking at the rear of the building which originally had land stretching down to the adjacent street. Of interest is the cowshed built right on the footpath. Many well-to-do families kept their own cows into the early decades of the 20th century, as the quality of delivered milk was poor.

The house was built around 1877 for John Stephens, an accountant. He was for 12 years the manager of ‘The Courier’ and later ‘The Queenslander’ newspapers, owned by his brother Thomas Blackett Stephens. It was also the home of Earnest Baynes and his family for some 12 years from around 1898. He was ringmaster of the Brisbane Exhibition and a stand is named after him. With his brothers, he owned a large meat processing and retail business.

The footpath in front of the house at number 10 was the scene of a gangland altercation over the treatment of a woman at around midnight on a hot December night in 1926. A violent criminal known as “Spider” Raper dragged the women indoors. Another resident of the house, George Ward, opened the front door a crack and fired a warning shot down the hallway with his revolver. Raper was standing in the wrong place, and was shot dead. Ward was found not guilty of murder by a jury.

4. Continuing down Hampstead Road, we come to Westbourne Street.

A short way down Westbourne Street, the attractive Victorian house “Lanark” at number 11 was built around 1882 for Mary Ann and Jonas Noble, proprietors of an ironmongery business.

Behind a car port and trees at number 15 stands the once grand home “Trevenen”, later called “Le Jardin”. Constructed by builder Phillip Nott in the 1870s as his private home, the house contained 25 rooms, including 6 bathrooms. The imposing original fence extends for around 150 metres down Westbourne Street. The property was broken up in the 1930s and several houses and flats from that period can be seen along the street.
From here, there are also glimpses of the front of “Tarong”.

5. Returning to Hampstead Road, the Arts and Crafts style home “Wairuna” is directly ahead at number 27. This house, a work of the acclaimed architect Robin Dods, was built for James and Elizabeth Allan between 1896 and 1900.

James Allan was co-founder of the retail firm Allan and Stark. Elizabeth nee Stark was the sister of his partner. Allan was also an alderman and local member of Parliament. The house was later owned by the Presbyterian Church and served as a hostel for servicewomen during World War 2.

After crossing the street and walking a short way back up the hill, we turn down Brighton Road. There was a horse drawn omnibus stand at this corner in the 19th century.

6. The impressive house on the right at number 35 was built around 1891 by Ellen Grenier, who named it ‘Franklin Villa’ in memory of her deceased husband Franklin Grenier. Some 6 months after his death, she married first husband’s cousin, Thomas Leichardt Grenier. As a rental property, it was the home of notable residents such as Archibald Meston, the official Protector of the Aborigines.

7. A short detour down Franklin Street brings us to number 37, the charming house “Marly”, built for Helene and George Bruce-Nicol in around 1888 on land that Helene’s father Emile Gaujard had purchased some years before. Bruce-Nicol was part owner and manager of the West End Brewery, located at the corner of Merivale and Boundary Streets. Streets. Helene and her daughters Corinne and Stella were highly active in charity work.
Stella was also a well known journalist. The house was sold around 1917 to the Anglican Church who used it as a maternity hospital.

8. **Returning to Brighton Road**, it’s hard to miss number 52, the imposing two storey brick home “Mon Abris”. It was built in 1890 for solicitor William Osborne and his wife Jane. The house was designed by the architecture partners Nicholson and Wright who were also responsible for the Normanby Hotel as well as the long gone West End Brewery. After serving as the home of the Bulcock family in the early 20th century, it was used as flats for around 100 years until its redevelopment.

9. **Another short detour down Sussex Street** brings us to Brighton Terrace at numbers 26 to 32. These two sets of duplex houses were built as an investment by Emile Guijard (see number 7 above) in 1889. After emigrating from France, Gaujard spent time in the Victorian Gold Fields, before running tobacconist businesses in Queen Street.

10. **Continuing down Brighton Road, we come to Boundary Street and turn to the left**. The dip ahead of us marks where a creek descending from Highgate Hill crossed the road on its way to the swampy land around Melbourne Street. After heavy rain, hen-coops, boilers, and tubs were swept down this watercourse, said to be quite deep in places, towards the reservoir at the corner of Melbourne and Manning streets.

    Whynot Street on the right was part of the “Whynot” Estate sold in 1881. “WHY NOT!“ was an advertising slogan for the sale.

11. Ahead of us is a bridge carrying Dornoch Terrace across Boundary Street. The first bridge over Boundary Street was built in 1888 to improve access to the homes then being built near the river. The current bridge was built in 1940 as part of preparatory work for a planned cross river bridge to the new University at St Lucia. The bridge was never built but is now part of the Brisbane City Council’s planning.

    **The stairs on the right of the bridge at Bristol Street take us up to Dornoch Terrace** past another former corner shop, now a residence. Back on Dornoch Terrace, the Victorian house precariously located on the edge of the cutting across the street at number 77 was called by its owners “Rocky Nook”.

12. **A short detour down Dornoch Terrace to the right** brings us to Toonarbin. This stately house was built for Sea Captain Henry O’Reilly in the late 1860s by the architect Benjamin Backhouse.
At the time, its location was so remote that people wondered why he had chosen to live in such a spot. O'Reilly was for many years Brisbane manager of the Australasian Steam Navigation Company and also a keen amateur astronomer. The house was later occupied by his son Charles who ran a business in Margaret Street.

It was purchased by the Roman Catholic Church in 1926 for use as a convent for the Sisters of Mercy. The outer brick walls date from this period. The adjacent church of St. Francis was moved to the site from the other side of Dornoch Terrace and a school was built. The house is now in private hands.

13. **Walking back up Dornoch Terrace** towards the bridge, a wide variety of buildings can be seen. The original houses to the city side on the left were built from the 1880s, some 30 to 40 years before most of those on the steep slopes to the right. In the early 20th century, Dornoch Terrace was one of Brisbane’s dress circles. Many houses had palm trees in their front gardens, creating an avenue effect. Many of the original homes have not survived the redevelopment of the last 50 years.

From the 1920s, there was an increase in the construction of purpose built flats in Brisbane’s inner suburbs. An attractive example with its mottled brick work is Regina Court at number 58 on the left. It was built in 1938 and the architect was Arthur Bligh.

14. The brick house at number 81 is an interesting example of the subdivision of large blocks which has been underway in the area for some 140 years. Standing on land once occupied by the tennis court of an adjacent house, this home was constructed in 1941 for the Topham family, just before wartime rationing of building material brought house construction to a standstill. It was designed by the architectural firm Hall and Phillips, who also designed Tattersall’s Club and worked on the City Hall.

15. The large house “Kinauld” at number 116 was built by Margaret Macintosh in 1887, replacing the family’s earlier and smaller home built around 1866. It is the work of architect Alexander Brown Wilson, who spent his childhood in the family house adjacent to Highgate Hill Park. Amongst his other works are the Lamb House at Kangaroo Point, the Plough Inn, and the Uniting Church at the corner of Vulture and Essex streets.

16. Sankey Street is the steepest on the southside of Brisbane and is named after the family who lived on a ridge down the street near the river. Sergeant-Major John Sankey, a veteran of the Xhosa wars in Africa, ran the stores of the Queensland Defence Force.

The houses flanking Sankey Street represent the early 20th century development of the steep south side of Dornoch Terrace. On the right is the Federation style bungalow “Carinya”, constructed around 1913 for Edwin Bulcock, a warehouseman, and his wife Sylvia.

On the left side with the distinctive roof is “Litmis”. This house was built by Richard Kelly and Annie Sachse in 1915.
Kelly was estranged from his family, who lived in nearby Carlton Street, due to his fits of drunken violence.

He had convinced Annie, a teacher at his commercial college in Edward Street, to live with him. The house and land were in Annie’s name, possibly in an attempt by Kelly to hide money from his creditors. As a result of a court action taken by Kelly’s family after his death, Annie lost ownership of the house in 1920.

It was then purchased by the Lutheran Church and named “Lutmis”, an abbreviation of “Lutheran Mission”. From here, Pastor Oto Theile ran the church’s missions in New Guinea for over 20 years.

17. As we pass Colton Street on the left think back to the year 1900, when most of the land stretching down to the river of the right was open paddock. In May of that year, a loose bullock was threatening the residents of Colton Street. A policeman shot it dead with his Enfield rifle. The animal was given to a local butcher.

“Glenwood” at number 132 Dornoch Terrace was built in 1882 by Henry Smith, a planing machinist and carpenter, as a middle-class rental property. Of note is the carving work on the veranda brackets. Such detailing was rare after the inflation of the 1890s pushed up labour costs. Members of the Hopkins family lived here from 1899 until 1943.

18. **After very carefully crossing Dornoch Terrace, we turn into Dauphin Terrace**, passing the European style brick house built on high ground above the corner, at number 147. It’s the work of noted Brisbane architect Mervyn Rylance and was completed in 1940 for accountant George Giles.

Whilst their homes no longer exist, Dauphin Terrace has had some interesting residents. Dr. Jefferis Turner and his wife Hilda lived in a house called “Daisybank” for many years. In 1889, he became the first medical officer of the Children’s Hospital. Working with a colleague, he uncovered the source of lead poisoning of children was from paint and made the first diagnosis of hookworm in Australia. He worked tirelessly to improve milk deliveries to reduce children’s illnesses from bad milk. He was also an expert in moths.

After returning to Brisbane from the socialist utopian colony of New Australia in Paraguay, Ernie and Mabel Lane lived towards the end of the street for many years. They were heavily involved in anti-conscription activities during World War 1. Ernie worked as a journalist reporting on Union affairs. The house was the centre of much of the couple’s political activities. It was under surveillance by Commonwealth Police during World War 2.

19. **We turn left into Brydon Street** and descend to the gully which was the scene of conflict between demonstrators and police lasting some weeks in 2001, when the pocket of bushland
was developed. The small park here was part of the compromise solution. We take the path up the slope on the left side of the park and then turning left, we have a short steep climb up to Beaconsfield Street.

Here we have one of a number of sections of streets in Highgate Hill that were planned but did not proceed as the land was too steep.

20. The worker’s cottage at 4 Roseberry Street, the first house on the left, was the childhood home of the sculptor Daphne Mayo. She also lived here for a period after her return from Europe in 1924.

21. After her success with the Brisbane City Hall tympanum, Mayo purchased two blocks of land nearby with frontages on Chester Street and Gladstone Road. Looking down Chester Street, the cottage designed for her by the architect Robert Cummings is visible sandwiched between later extensions, in the block with the series of underground garages. Next door a porphyry fence, built for her by one of the masons who worked on the City Hall, marks where her studio once stood.

Here there is a choice to curtail the walk and continue to Gladstone Road, or to explore the hidden world of the back streets overlooking the river. If you continue to Gladstone Road, turn left and skip to item 26.

Otherwise, we turn right onto Beaconsfield Street, walk to its end, and descend the walkway to the street below. From here we continue up the hill and then proceed down Rosecliffe Street.

22. Number 41 on the right was built by the Reverend Douglas Price. He came to Brisbane to take up a role as lecturer at the Anglican Theological College. He later became rector of All Saints in Wickham Terrace. In 1911, Archbishop Donaldson asked him to resign as his theology had become unacceptably unorthodox. At the behest of his congregation, he founded a Modernist Church. In this period he also published several periodicals, a book of short stories and two novels. Price was however a troubled soul. A friend called to visit him here at “Puck’s Place”, as he called his house, one morning in December of 1916 and found that he had committed suicide.

23. We continue to the end of the street and then go down the path on the left to a wooden bridge across a gully. Here you can get a feel for what the banks of Brisbane River looked like before the arrival of Europeans.

24. After walking up the road on the other side we turn left into Bower Street and arrive at Gladstone Road.

The famous long-range weather forecaster Inigo Jones lived in a house on the left in the 1920s and 30s where there is now a car park. He had his observatory here before moving to the family
Farm in the Sunshine Coast hinterland.

On the right hand corner, John Clark had his home and omnibus stables. He ran a service down Gladstone Road to the city from 1898 until the tram line was extended to Dutton Park in 1908. The trip took around 30 minutes and cost threepence. On the right is one of the many 1930 era tram stop shelters surviving around Brisbane.

25. **We turn left and walk along busy Gladstone Road** which probably follows the route of an Aboriginal track leading to the Goodna district. We pass Rosary Crescent on the other side of the road. At the top of the hill, Ursuline nuns occupied the home “Wahcambah” built by early landowner, Edward Deighton. It was later moved across the road.

26. At number 147, we get another glimpse of Daphne Mayo’s cottage, partially hidden behind a newer brick extension.

27. Just before the crest of the hill, we pass the Highgate Hill service reservoir. Looking up from the footpath, the igloo shaped roofs are visible. The reservoir was built in 1889 to improve the poor water reticulation in South Brisbane. It was gravity fed by a pipeline from Gold Creek Dam near Brookfield. The pipeline passes under the river at Toowong and then up Dornoch Terrace.

28. The dormer roofed Victorian house “Prospect Place” visible from across the Gladstone Road, at number 1 Gertrude Street, is a reminder of the controversial Ebenezer Thorne. He built the house as an investment and later lived there.

He was accused of many things including cattle theft, fraud in relation to his Dugong Oil company, corruption as an alderman, and publishing favourable articles on political candidates in his newspapers for a fee. In 1906 he travelled to England leaving his second wife Sarah living in the house. There he married an elderly widow and inherited her savings when she died. He then travelled to New Zealand where he married once again under an assumed name.
name. He died in 1911 and the truth emerged when his New Zealand widow went to court to regain her property.

Thorne’s daughter Carina also lived here before moving to Sydney to study medicine. She was a poet and also invented a method of treating tuberculosis.

In 1909, widow Sarah Addison purchased the grocery business in the shop on the corner only to find that the seller, Harold Coleman, was a con man. Much of the stock was fake. She managed to get £25 back through the small debts court.

29. Across Gladstone Road where the block of flats stands, there once stood “Beaumont”, the former home of Judge Charles Blakeney and his wife Ellen. It burnt down in a spectacular fire in 1884, visible all over Brisbane. A few years earlier an elderly Judge Blakeney wandered from here across Gladstone Road and fell into the river. His body was found a few days later. He was the father of William Theophilus Blakeney who we met earlier in the walk.

At the intersection of Dornoch terrace and Gladstone Road there was once an open piece of land where political rallies were held from time to time. **We arrive again at Dornoch Terrace and turn left.**

30. The fire hydrant outside number 191 is one of a handful of cast iron hydrants remaining in Brisbane. Installation of these commenced in 1902, though this example probably dates from the 1920s. The initials MWSSB stand for Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board.

31. Returning to our starting point, we pass the residential building “Torbreck” towering over Dornoch Terrace. Completed in 1960, Torbreck was Queensland’s first multi-storied home unit development. This was a totally new concept for Brisbane, with each of the 150 home units having at least one private balcony, electric kitchen, sewerage, and garbage disposal facilities, washing machine and clothes drier. Softened water was provided via storage tanks on the roof, and the latest in automatic lifts provided.

It was built on the site of the 1876 house of the same name that Simon Fraser and his wife Lucy Anne nee Simpson. Fraser was auctioneer and parliamentarian. Torbreck means “the brow of the hill” in Gaelic and reflects Fraser’s highland Scottish origins.

32. The flats with the interesting detailing at number 187 were built in 1934, when the use of fibro-cement was coming into vogue.
33. The house at number 165 was built from stone in around 1894 by publican John Charles Rumf. He called the house “Karlsruh”. By 1908, by John and Janet Thomson were living there. They renamed it after Janet’s parents’ home “Daar Lodge”, in Kirendbright, Scotland. Thomson ran a bookshop in Queen Street in partnership with his brother. At the age of 52, he enlisted in the 1st AIF and was wounded while serving with the 11th Field Artillery Brigade in France in 1918. To avoid the 45 year old limit on recruitment, he deducted 8 years from his age.

After John’s death in 1930, Janet started a boarding house business in the house. Room numbers were still visible over the doorways of downstairs rooms 50 years later. The interior featured large curved-top cedar separating doors in the sitting room, ornate tiling and marble around the fireplaces and highly detailed plaster ceilings. Considerable damage was done in the 1990s when a fire broke out. It was rumoured that the people renting the house were using only candlelight.

After very carefully crossing the street, our walk concludes back at Highgate Hill Park, a pleasant spot for a rest or picnic.