

WANSTEAD

WHERE THE OTHER HALFLIVES

"THE IMPORTANT thing to know about Wanstead is that it's not Leytonstone," a friend who lives there told me. "It's not Ilford. It's not Walthamstow, and above all it's not Essex."

Hardly the most glowing recommendation for a place — it's like saying that Prince William is bright compared with the rest of his family — but Wanstead does seem to be something of a diamond in the roughness of East London. It's about the only piece of civilisation as you head northeast out of the city and offers convenience both for getting into and escaping Central London — it sits between the two branches of the Central Line and is within five minutes of the M11 by car. It is a top destination for media types, lawyers (including Mark Stephens, the ubiquitous solicitor on celebrities and human rights issues), and fledgling City workers who live there before their bonuses allow them to move to Surrey.

Families love Wanstead, voted the best little-known village in London by *Time Out*, because of the wide pavements and abundant

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leafiness. The high street has the sort of open-air cafés and shops that you find in Highgate and the local schools, including the private Forest School, are among the best in the borough. The only thing Wanstead seems to lack is a bookshop — a scandal considering that it was the birthplace of Stanley Morison, the designer of Times New Roman, the font on which today's *Times* script is based. Although he was born in Wanstead in 1889, he left as a young adult. Perhaps he was told that people didn't want his type round here.

Unlike those more uncouth enclaves of Chigwell or Loughton, Wanstead doesn't have many million-pound footballers or soap stars, although the actress who plays Kat Moon in *EastEnders* is a local. It has nourished decent cricketers, however, including the recent England captain Nasser Hussain. The actor Tony Robinson also grew up there.

Wanstead was represented in Parliament for 40 years by Sir Winston Churchill. Cashing in on his name somewhat, the local agent Churchill Estates says that one-bedroom flats can be bought for about £150,000, with two-bed mid-terrace homes selling for up to £300,000 and four-bed semis for about £500,000.

At the really grand end, Churchill is selling a six-bedroom Victorian house on Grove Park for £1.3 million and another on St Mary's Avenue for £1,495,000. Further posh residences can be found on The Warren Drive, which backs on to the golf course.

The village once even had its own stately home. Wanstead House was the home of the Earl of Essex under Elizabeth I and, rebuilt as a magnificent Palladian palace, was one of the finest homes around. Sadly the estate passed by marriage to the dissolute nephew of the Duke of Wellington, one William Pole-Tylney-Long-Wellesley (which sounds like Leyton Orient football club's back line), who promptly gambled away his wife's fortune. The house was demolished to pay his debts, but her loss was the Wanstead residents' gain: the grounds of the estate are now a delightful park.

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