

## The Museum of...

# Burgh House and Hampstead Museum

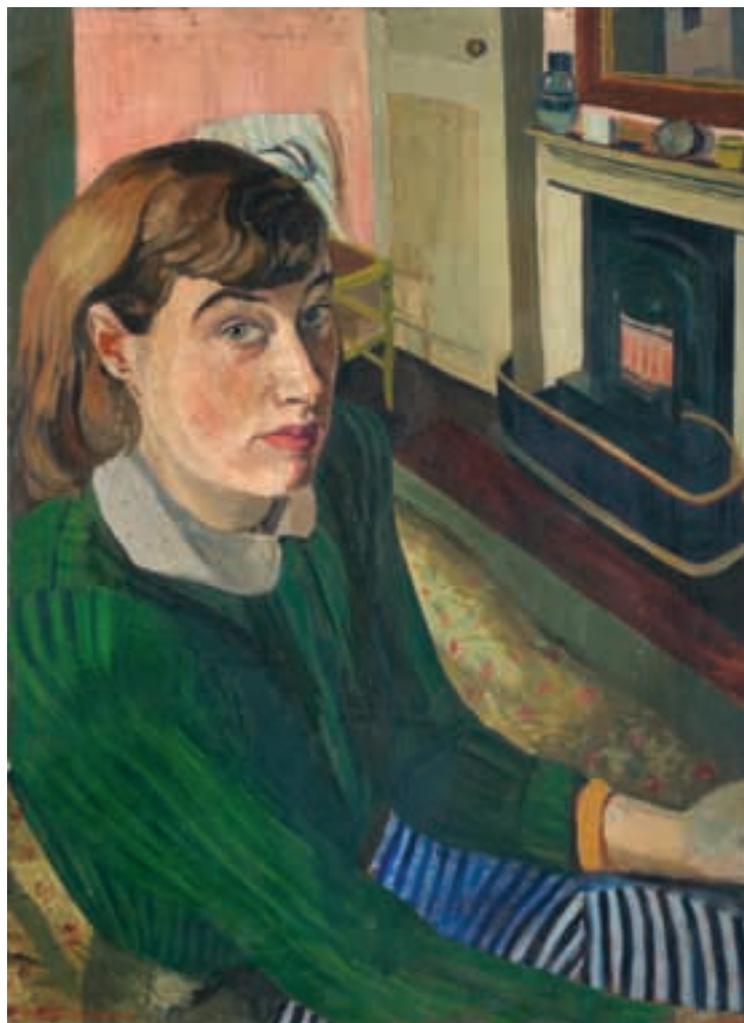
A Queen Anne townhouse close to Hampstead Heath combines an impressive 20th-century art holding with local history collections, writes *Louise Gray*

**What** Burgh House is a Grade I-listed Queen Anne townhouse and local history museum in the heart of Hampstead, north London. “The house has been inhabited by many people of note, including William Gibbons, a promoter of the Hampstead spa waters in the 1720s, and Elsie Bambridge, daughter of the author Rudyard Kipling, in the 1930s,” says its curator, Rebecca Lodge. In 1946, Hampstead Borough Council announced plans to take over the house as a community centre, with a children’s library and an “old people’s room”. In 1977, Camden Council (which took over from Hampstead Council in 1965) closed the building indefinitely and local residents formed the Burgh House Group. Local celebrities, including Melvyn Bragg and Judi Dench, manned stalls in the high street campaigning to “Keep Burgh House”. By 1979, more than £42,000 had been raised and the council agreed to lease the house to a newly formed charity, the Burgh House Trust.

**Opened** 1979.

**Collection** “In 1979, local historians Christopher and Diana Wade founded the Hampstead Museum at Burgh House, appealing widely for the loan or donation of objects and artworks,” Lodge says. The collection now includes more than 3,000 objects relating to the local area, and permanent displays charting Hampstead’s history are supplemented by changing exhibitions that explore different aspects of the area, its history and residents.

**Highlights** “Burgh House has a superb art collection, and a selection of works by early 20th-century Slade School artists will be on display in January 2015, including Duncan Grant and CRW Nevinson,” Lodge says. The house owns the



**Above:** Burgh House and the Hampstead Museum has an art collection well-stocked with artists from London’s Slade School, including this self-portrait by Daphne Charlton. **Below:** Burgh House is a Grade I-listed Queen Anne house. It spent some years as a community centre before becoming a museum in 1979



largest public collection of art by Victorian watercolourist Helen Allingham, as well as her painting chair, family bibles and personal letters. “So many objects reveal fascinating insights into local lives, from a pair of skis that were used in the snow on Hampstead Heath in the 1930s, to the blouse and hat worn by Daphne Charlton [who lived opposite Burgh House] in the famous portrait painted by her lover Stanley Spencer,” Lodge says.

**Help at hand** Burgh House has a staff team of three – a director, a curator and an operations and events manager. They run the house with the help of a small team of dedicated volunteers and events staff.

**Budget** “We have never charged for entrance,” says Mark Francis, the director of Burgh House, “and we receive no council or government support, so all income is raised through donations and private hire.”

**Sticky moment** “There are sticky moments but the trick is never letting our visitors know,” Francis says.

**Survival tips** “We have moved to create larger, better and longer-running exhibitions with wider appeal and a broad programme of events running alongside,” Francis says. “This has massively broadened our appeal across not only London but as a visitor destination. We believe you have to speculate to accumulate in order to survive in these harder times, investing in the building and staff time to raise our profile and grow as a charity. It is essential that places like Burgh House continue to engage and embrace new audiences.”

Giving Friends’ membership to wedding clients and showing the museum to those attending private events has created a more enthusiastic pool of visitors, Francis believes. “Welcoming new families with a love for the house keeps the place dynamic and fresh,” he says.

**Visitors** 20,000 visitors last year, plus more than 13,500 visitors for talks, recitals, classes and private events.

**Future plans** Burgh House and Hampstead Museum is fundraising to support a refurbishment, which will include the restoration of the 1720s gate piers, rewiring and work on the original Georgian panelling and barley-twist staircase. It is also digitising its collection for its website.

[www.burghhouse.org.uk](http://www.burghhouse.org.uk)