

The Curious Case of the Club House

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A large photograph hangs in the reception of Fellowship House. A peaceful summer afternoon on Willifield Green, Edwardian children staring into the camera. Little hint of the short life and curious end of one of the Suburb's few original community buildings: the Club House standing in the background.

With her drive to create a community rather than a mere housing estate Henrietta Barnett spent many hours with architect Raymond Unwin discussing the facilities of a building which would enhance her planned utopia. It should stand on a green surrounded by the cottages of the 'artisan's quarter'. It would contain inter alia a reading room/library, a smoking lounge, a games room with billiard tables, large and small halls and a women's meeting room and various 'other allurements for the members of the industrial classes'. The 'allurements', of course, stopped short of a bar in line with the Dame's conviction that spare time was better spent on tennis, gardening and self improvement.

Unwin entrusted the detailed design to one of the rising young stars of his practice, a dreamy rather enigmatic character called Charles Paget Wade. He was an accomplished draughtsman, much given to exotic dress, coiffure and amateur dramatics.

Unwin was already inspired by the architecture of medieval Bavarian towns, for example Rothenburg ob der Tauber. Wade took up this preoccupation with enthusiasm. Some examples he worked on are visible in today's Suburb – the Great Wall and the entrance to Hampstead Way at Temple Fortune. The trouble is that there are so few they sit rather incongruously amidst the surrounding English vernacular.

Wade's design for the Club House was a particularly striking example of this unease. Grafted onto a quintessentially English assemblage of gables and dormers,

an overbearing Germanic tower (a purely decorative feature) looked down upon the roses round the door cottages of the 'artisan's quarter'. Behind were tennis courts (yes, tennis again) and a bowling green.

Whatever the opinions then or now about the design, the Club House as a focal point for community based activities was a huge success for the thirty years from February 1910 when it opened its doors until 1940. During the First World War it served as a hospital for recovering wounded soldiers before resuming its former role in the local community when peace came.

Suddenly on 25th September 1940 the life of this building was snuffed out by a large bomb dropped on the Green, courtesy of the Luftwaffe – evidently with little regard for Germanic towers built by foreigners. The damage was substantial though not terminal and despite repair being an option the Club House was eventually demolished.

There followed 17 long years of fruitless wrangling between the various parties involved with the

Club House on what to do with the site. This was despite the pre-war popularity and financial viability of the building and the payment of £15,000 of Government War Damage compensation. Eventually the Trust sold off half the site to a developer on which a house of entirely indifferent design would appear and Edward Parry rode in to the rescue with his plan for the present Fellowship House on the remaining half.

The Trust was not enthused by Parry's appeal for funding, committing only £2,000 and writing that it saw itself neither legally nor morally bound to utilise the Government compensation money to help this or any other such project.

How well was the Suburb served by the Trust and the RA? Then as now these were the bodies specifically charged with protecting architecture, amenities and residents' interests. There remain more questions than answers.

On a brighter note, the Trust did give Parry two 999 year leases with peppercorn rents (for Fellowship House and the Bowling



Green – now a croquet lawn and allotments).

A final thought is that Unwin and Wade weren't the only architects inspired by medieval German architecture. Had the Club House survived the war, there would have been, looming above us, a frightening reference to the main watch tower at Auschwitz, that infamous motif of the Holocaust. There are better memorials.



Answers to Virtual Museum Winter Quiz in the last edition of Suburb News

1. Wheelie Bins - hgsh heritage.org.uk/Detail/objects/sn20-p1
2. John Carter - hgsh heritage.org.uk/Detail/objects/sn59-p1
3. Hampstead Way had 595 houses (Willifield Way was close behind with 527). Answer in the graph towards the bottom of the Intro page – hgsh heritage.org.uk/Detail/collections/c1911-0
4. A baby elephant – see photo hgsh heritage.org.uk/Detail/objects/HGSAT19
5. 70 – see hgsh heritage.org.uk/Detail/collections/WW2-0
6. 30 – see hgsh heritage.org.uk/Detail/collections/WW2-0
7. 31st August 1940 - hgsh heritage.org.uk/Detail/collections/WW2-3-1-0
8. Four: Wilson, Shinwell, Mandelson, Clarke, see hgsh heritage.org.uk/Detail/entities/id%3A37
9. July 1983 – see hgsh heritage.org.uk/Detail/collections/smarchive
10. 'Matters That Matter' – see hgsh heritage.org.uk/Detail/objects/HBS3
11. In 1906 by Raymond Unwin – see hgsh heritage.org.uk/Detail/collections/H130
12. Unwin printed the map of the Eastern extension part in 1920
13. 12 - hgsh heritage.org.uk/Detail/collections/allotments-2
14. Alfred Kamester - hgsh heritage.org.uk/Detail/collections/GSS50
15. Culmer & Alford - hgsh heritage.org.uk/Detail/collections/GSS50
16. Henry VIII acquired land from Eton College and that land was subsequently bought by HB for HGS. See hgsh heritage.org.uk/Detail/collections/id%3A91
17. 10,000 according to the text in the caption of the archer photo, hgsh heritage.org.uk/Detail/collections/bob1471 (then scroll down to the 'East Finchley' sub-heading and Archer photo with adjacent words '10,000 arrows').
18. Queen Mary, see hgsh heritage.org.uk/Detail/collections/RLC-A225
19. Hermione Granger, see hgsh heritage.org.uk/Detail/entities/id%3A37
20. Residents cared for Belgian refugees, staffed the Garden Suburb Hospital, sewed, joined the Special Constabulary and Volunteer Training Corps. See hgsh heritage.org.uk/Detail/collections/WW1-1
21. Situated at the top entrance to Bigwood, the gate lies along the boundary of the Bishop of London's land, dividing the parishes of Hendon and Finchley, hgsh heritage.org.uk/Detail/collections/WW2-4-0
22. The horticultural society was the first society in the Suburb, created on the 20th of May 1909. Organisations: HGS Horticultural Society
23. 106 Willifield Way. Collections: Raymond Lowe collection of postcards.
24. Son of Rev William Maxwell Rennie, the third vicar of St Jude's who died rescuing children off the SS City of Benares after being torpedoed in September 1940. There is a memorial painting by Walter Stammer in the Church, Hampstead Garden Suburb Virtual Museum: Physical Object: Michael Rennie and the 'SS City of Benares' (hgsh heritage.org.uk)
25. 1968 – to protect its special characteristics, houses, layout, boundaries trees etc. Hampstead Garden Suburb Virtual Museum: Collection: Conservation area 50 years collection [CA50-1] (hgsh heritage.org.uk)
26. The cock and first weather vane – the work on the spine led to the discovery of two time capsules. One containing a note from Cannon Barnett and the other pictures and notes in a whisky bottle from the builders. Hampstead Garden Suburb Virtual Museum: Collection: St Jude's Spire, Weathervane and Time Capsules [SJS] (hgsh heritage.org.uk)
27. The houses in Hampstead Way were renumbered in 1913, hgsh heritage.org.uk/Detail/collections/c1911-0-1-12 (second paragraph)
28. The opening of the tube line extension to Goldens Green, hgsh heritage.org.uk/Detail/collections/64 (second paragraph)

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