

LETCHWORTH HAPPY 80TH BIRTHDAY, FREE CHURCH

Dr Mervyn Miller, who has been a member of the Trust Council since 1979, has written a new book called "Letchworth - The First Garden City". Letchworth has the unique distinction of being the world's first Garden City, based on the philosophy which Ebenezer Howard set out in his book "Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform", published in 1898. Howard extended the work of the housing reformers to encompass the purchase of an undeveloped estate and the laying out of a complete town with housing, industry and open space. He set environmental standards for the 20th century, and the Garden City Association, founded in 1899, promoted the implementation of the idea. The Letchworth Estate was opened in October 1903.

The Master Plan for Letchworth was prepared by Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin, two of the major pioneers of town planning in Britain who influenced the adoption of Garden City standards for public and private sector housing from the 1920s onwards. The industrial development of Letchworth set a precedent for planned factory estates and the creation of a varied economic base, with the emphasis on skilled manufacture. The community and social life of Letchworth was notorious in the "pioneer" years for such cults as vegetarianism and theosophy - and for the "smock and sandal simple life brigade" who regarded the infant town as a personal Utopia. However, these new approaches towards



Michael and Joan Holton with their French guests.

lifestyle fostered 20th-century values in sharp contrast to the attitudes of Victorian England.

The concept of a planned, self-contained town, sparsely laid out and protected by an agricultural green belt, has been widely adopted and formed the basis for the state-sponsored post-1945 New Towns.

In terms of the period and the architects involved there are many similarities between Letchworth and the Suburb, and we are sure the book will be of interest to many Suburb residents. It is beautifully produced with numerous photographs and illustrations and is available from the Trust Office, price £14.95.

Mervyn Miller is now working with Stuart Gray on a book about the Suburb. This will be published in 1992 to mark the Suburb's 85th Anniversary. Stuart, who lives in Temple Fortune Hill, is recognised to be one of the most distinguished architectural historians of the Edwardian period.

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Strong winds were not unknown on Central Square in 1910, and on the gusty winter's night of 18th February in that year, at a meeting in The Institute, 59 names of Suburb residents were incorporated in the first roll of the HGS Free Church. Those present that night joined themselves together to subscribe to the new Church's Covenant, and thus marked the inauguration. Eighty years later, to the day, at an anniversary service the congregation spoke together the words of the Covenant, now set in Liturgical form by their Minister, the Rev. Peter Barraclough. Its simplicity is appealing: "And thus by a voluntary act, constituted into a Church of Jesus Christ, we will from this time forth endeavour to bear one another's burdens and to rejoice in one another's welfare". The "Manchester Guardian", as it was then, reported "The latest experiment in the enterprising air of the Hampstead Garden Suburb is that of a Free Church which is really free to all denominations. The Suburb has obtained the most original chapel in or near London. The foundation is no less original for the fact that there is no other truly inter-denominational Free Church in the country." Today this seems a little over the top, but 80 years later it was an event to celebrate.

As a prelude, on 10th February the Church Choir staged, almost unbelievably, a performance of Handel's "Messiah" under the direction of Dr John Winter, organist and choir-master. This was hailed by the critics as "a joyously triumphant demonstration of community festivity in Lutyen's beloved church". A feast it was indeed

for the many present. During the following week old friends and members began to gather from afar. In 1989, the Free Church had successfully twinned with a Protestant reformed church in the Parisian Suburb of Montrouge. So, already established friendships were further cemented by the arrival of twelve members from Montrouge, including their president Mme Dumont and Pasteur Mme Dorte Rigoulot. Their weekend was spent in Suburb homes and visiting London, and on the eve of the anniversary all were together en fête in the Northway Hall for an evening repast, with thirsts quenched by Evian water. All the local churches were represented. There followed a musical entertainment by the Choir, and the youth orchestra under Maestro Brian Stonhold. Two cakes were needed to bear the eighty candles which were lighted ten at a time by a representative of members who had joined the Church in each decade, with Nellie Deane for the 1910s to Nicholas Birch for the 1980s. The cake was cut and "Happy Birthday" sung.

It was a real-time reflection of eighty years of Suburb history, personified by the presence of Miss Molly Trapp who, with other children of the Sunday School, had her initials carved on one of the foundation bricks of the new Church. On the following day, bright and clear, the 80th anniversary service began. Conducted by the Minister and assisted by Pasteur Rigoulot, in a bilingual recognition of the new-found bond with Montrouge, the Mayor of Barnet, Mrs Dot Benson, and our MP, Mr John Marshall, joined in the celebration of the



Rev. Peter Barraclough and Pasteur Requetel.



Nellie Dean lights the first candle for the 90's.

event. How lucky we are to have such supportive civic representatives! Many other Suburb organisations were represented, not least the Residents Association by their chairman Miss Eileen Whelan. In human terms, the 80th birth-

day party tends to be the last to be marked in any major way within an individual's lifetime. However 2010 is not now all that far ahead, and let us hope that our Suburb communities will then be as lively as they are now.

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Barnet Draft Unitary Development Plan

Since abolition of the GLC, planning in London has been organised by the Government using the Department of the Environment (DoE) and the Department of Transport (DTP) to pull together the plans of thirty-two disconnected boroughs, to an overall plan decided by Government. These borough plans are called Unitary Development Plans (UDPs). The boroughs themselves now have almost no powers either to plan or to finance plans. The UDP system started to come into effect in March 1989, and the Barnet UDP was issued towards the end of November 1989. Comments on its 130 pages, two maps, 140 formal policies and 71 specific proposals (not to mention two and a half pages of vehicle-parking standards and eleven pages of schedules listing proposals, outstanding planning permissions and transport route schemes) had to be in by 9th February 1990.

Despite this serious lack of time, the RA did by the skin of our teeth manage to put in a relatively comprehensive response before the deadline.

Policies and specific proposals are set out in the UDP under eight headings - General, En-

vironmental Quality, Leisure and Tourism, Community Services, Shopping, Employment, Housing and Movement (i.e. transport). The RA response commented on all eight sections, but started off by regretting that the UDP offered almost no comments, let alone criticisms, of DoE or DTP policies, and offered no alternative to those policies.

Two points of interest in the UDP are perhaps worth special notice. On housing, the UDP states that homelessness in the borough is continuing to increase, and that "Local Authorities no longer have a significant role in house building and housing cost subsidy". On road traffic the UDP, using DTP statistics, predicts that by the year 2001 there will be nearly 30 per cent more cars per resident, and in general backs the DTP proposals for more and more road "improvements".

If you are interested, a copy of the UDP can be obtained from the Barnet Directorate of Technical Services, Barnet House, 1255 High Road, Whetstone. A copy of the RA response can be obtained from the Secretary of the Residents Association.

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