

SUBURB VISIT TO LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY

On April 30th a party of Hampstead Garden Suburb residents visited Letchworth Garden City. It was the last activity organised by Eileen Whelan in her capacity as chairman of the Residents Association, and our new chairman, Léonie Stephen, also accompanied us.

We were fortunate to be guided by Mervyn Miller, a leading authority on the Garden City Movement. Our first visit was to the First Garden City Heritage Museum, where we were given coffee in the beautiful garden, and a warm welcome from the museum staff. Housed in the offices of Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin, the museum contains much of its original furnishings, an account of Letchworth's history, and mementos of Ebenezer Howard, founder of Letchworth (including the shorthand typewriter he invented). The style of the thatched building was inspired by medieval hall houses. Parker's office in the 'solar' had a squint through which he could keep an eye on the high-jinks of his

assistants in the drawing office below.

The building of Letchworth, begun in 1903, was the practical outcome of Howard's dream of an ideal city, first outlined in 1898 in his book *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*. Between its foundation and the First World War Letchworth attracted much interest, and gained a reputation as an eccentric community inhabited by the 'smock and sandal simple life brigade', where vegetarianism, theosophy, and primitive pagan rites prevailed. The Skittles Inn was teetotal; and, as on the Suburb, maypoles, pageants, and masques formed an integral part of community life. Whereas the Garden Suburb is essentially dependent on London for its services, the Garden City was conceived as a viable town. Howard's plan was for a city with a wholesome environment, where houses, community centres, schools and parks would be situated adjacent to agricultural land, so the city could provide its own produce. A range of industries and railway links



We saw the exterior of the home of the eccentric Annie Jane Lawrence, where she held Fabian and Theosophy summer schools and open-air concerts; and of St Christopher's School (originally the houses of Parker and Unwin). Both had open sleeping porches, in keeping with the Letchworth principle of healthy living. We walked around Homesgarth Co-operative Flats, promoted and lived in by Howard. We also viewed the Spirella Factory, nicknamed 'Castle Corset'. It was built in 1912-20 by Hignett, with a reinforced concrete structure and vast areas of window space, as part of Letchworth's flourishing industrial development. Its design forms a remarkable bridge between Arts and Crafts and Modernism.

Our final call was at The Settlement (formerly the Skittles Inn), where we were greeted with a magnificent home-made tea. It was a flawless day; the perfect ending for Eileen's term of office.

Eunice Kossoff

would be equally accessible. Parker and Unwin were responsible for planning both Letchworth and the Garden Suburb. Houses in both areas had architects in common, and there are a number of similarities between the residential areas of both communities.

During our tour we were able to assess the layout of the city. Parker and Unwin originally planned a formal Town Square after Lutyen's Central Square on the Suburb, but it was never carried out. Now the square is open in the centre, surrounded by Lombardy poplars where there would have been grand buildings. Unwin carefully incorporated existing open spaces into his plan, in the same way as he took account of the Heath when planning the Suburb. There is careful grouping of houses, as on the Suburb, with central greens and closes.

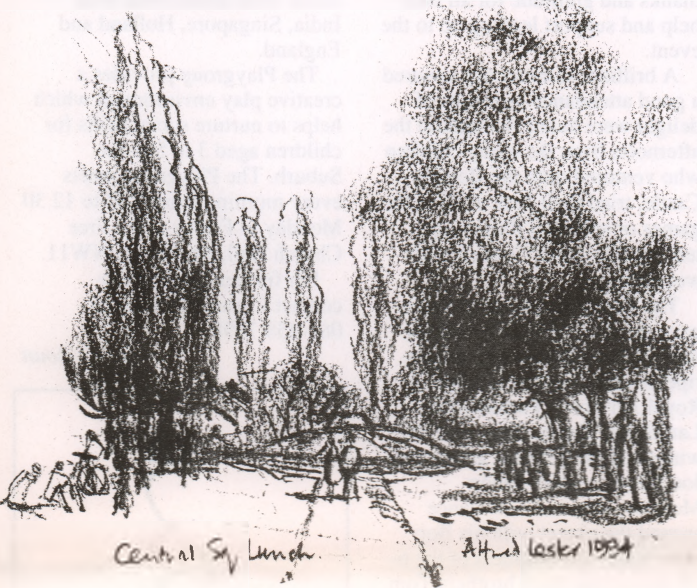
In 1905 Thomas Adams devised a 'Cheap Cottages' Exhibition, a competition designed to promote the possibility of building cottages under £150 which could be

afforded by an agricultural worker. During a short walk we saw the exteriors of several of these houses. Most still survive in good condition, some built in traditional idiom, some incorporating innovative construction. A house by James Brodie, city engineer of Liverpool, pioneered the use of prefabricated reinforced concrete panels set in steel frames, transported by rail from Liverpool.

We were able to visit the carefully preserved interiors of three Arts and Crafts style buildings. The first two were private houses, and the generosity of Mr and Mrs Carter and Mr and Mrs Grist, who showed us round, was greatly appreciated. The Stanley Parker House was designed in 1909 by Barry Parker for his furniture-making brother, with low sweeping roofs, open plan interior, and exposed beams. It is set in an artistic enclave inhabited in the early days of Letchworth by such luminaries as Gilman, Gore and Ratcliffe. 'Tanglewood' (1907) by H.M. Baillie Scott, is one of his most important domestic houses, with

roofs and mullioned windows brought low, exposed timber structure, unplastered walls, and inglenook fireplace. The Friends' Meeting House (1907) Bennett and Bidwell), is a superb building, with fine joinery and stone mullions, donated by Miss Juliet Reckitt (of Reckitt's Blue), who used to live there.

Picture and sketches by Alfred Lister

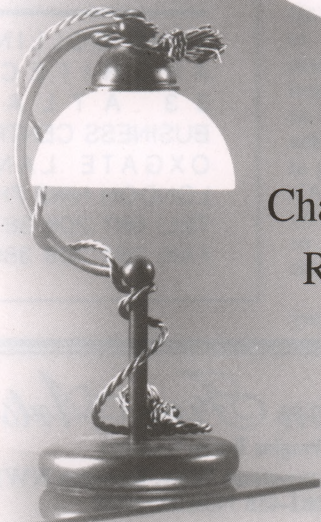


LONDON'S BIGGEST LIGHTING STORE

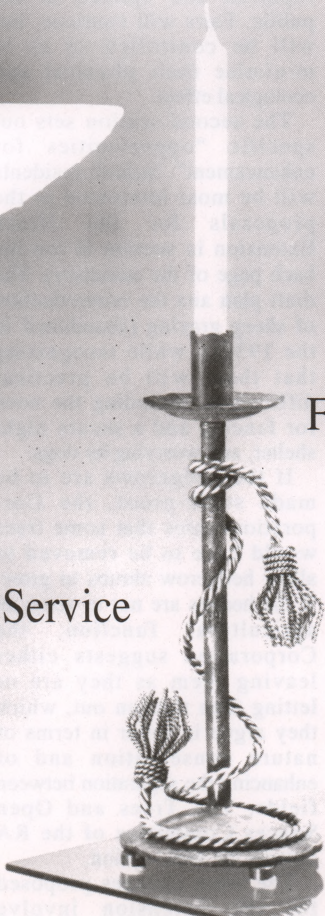
Decorative Lighting:

- Modern
- Traditional
- Low Voltage
- Accessories

THE FOCUS GALLERY



- Chandelier Cleaning
- Renovation
- Spares
- Shades-Custom Service
- Contract
- Design Service



- Furnishing Accessories
- Candles
- Free Gift Wrapping

794-800 Finchley Road,
Temple Fortune,
London NW11 7UT
Telephone 081 455 1234

