

Outside influences on the Suburb



The Trust held a Members' Event in December when David Davidson gave those present an interesting, informative and entertaining lecture on the subject of the medieval Bavarian town of Rothenburg and its influence on Hampstead Garden Suburb's chief architect and planner, Raymond Unwin.

We discovered that last summer's study visit to the town was born of the Conservation

Area Appraisal carried out by residents, the Trust and Barnet Council. This appraisal prompted the question of why is our Suburb as it is? A part of the answer lies abroad we were told.

There were already continental influences at work in Britain, but Rothenburg's architecture and townscape had a very considerable influence on Unwin. A fact of which the people of Rothenburg were unaware, and we were told

there were gasps of surprise when the importance of the German influence of the late 1800's was explained to them in the lecture that was given there.

The medieval walled town was an urban setting that possessed individuality, was picturesque and of human scale; qualities all evident in the design of the Suburb. Unwin's most important text, *Town Planning in Practice: An Introduction to the Art of*

Designing Cities and Suburbs, shows much German influence including many maps and plans of German origin.

Unwin's design gave the Suburb the appearance of being the result of organic growth rather than the more familiar unnatural urban grid development. The Great Wall, typically medieval, was built first and marked the divide between town and country. The Germanic influence can be seen in the Suburb gateways at the end of Hampstead Way in Temple Fortune and at the end of Northway in The Market Place. The old Club House on Willifield Green and Waterlow Court were among the other examples of this influence that were mentioned. Roofscapes were an integral part of the design and incorporated focal points such as the Willifield tower.

The difference between Letchworth and our Suburb are striking and not only because of Parker's greater influence in the former. For the Suburb the constraints imposed by the amount of land available created a space problem that encouraged a contained settlement with defined borders favouring the ideas Unwin had formed from his study of Rothenburg. By contrast land was not such a problem for Letchworth and so the characteristics of the Garden City and Suburb differ. Unwin's vision was better controlled in the Suburb and included many

English vernacular themes; in part because he was able to exert more influence through the approval of architects. We were even given a hint of the friction that existed between Unwin and Lutyens over the imposition of the latter's brand in Central Square.

The whole talk was amply illustrated with a number of slides both old and new from the Suburb and Rothenburg demonstrating the influences and similarities being described, and three of which are reproduced here.

A very unscientific piece of eavesdropping after the event appeared to show that the audience went home with a new understanding of the Suburb's architectural heritage and a

feeling of having shared a special event with their neighbours and others who attended out of a mutual interest in something special – Hampstead Garden Suburb.



Children display their artworks at the end of an art session at the Garden Suburb Library with local artist/teacher Hazel Lopatkin in July 2013, where the children created masks inspired by the work of Giuseppe Arcimboldo. (See more on the Suburb library on page 1.)



(Above & right) Members of the congregation of the Free Church enjoyed the annual Christmas Tree Gift Service when the children performed a traditional nativity play

(Below & below right) With the traditional nativity play under pressure, St Jude's maintains tradition with angels as angelic as ever



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