



The Great Wall

President Trump has made global news headlines out of “a Big Beautiful Wall” over the last 12 months and more. Since his inauguration the world has been kept guessing about how seriously to take it although presidential tweets have kept the idea alive and, from time to time, these are followed by serious analysis and discussions. At the time of writing, we’ve just learned it will be fitted with solar panels: “A Solar Wall – my Idea!” Those who claim it cannot happen cite all the things against it not least the construction cost, the ownership of the land and the disruption to both wildlife and commerce that a solid barrier would provide.

Raymond Unwin planned his Hampstead Garden Suburb Great Wall as a structure not to mark a political border but to provide a visual break between rus and urbe, country and town, or more precisely, the fields of the Heath extension and the houses to be built by The Garden Suburb Development Company on the prime land overlooking it. He saw it as a visual recreation of a medieval wall built for defence, as found in much of Northern Europe: as he wrote in *Town Planning in Practice* in 1909 “though we shall not copy the fortified wall of the old city, we may take from it a most pregnant suggestion of the value of defining and limiting towns, suburbs, and new areas generally.” The wall would mark the boundary between man’s work and that of nature and, most importantly, keep them apart and distinct. His Great Wall followed the length of the boundary between housing and the Heath Extension from Hampstead Way to Wildwood Road.

The lovely pen and ink drawings made by Unwin’s eccentric employee, Charles Paget Wade, show the wall in both picture map form and in a perspective drawing from the Heath side but as yet no architectural drawings have come to light. What is lacking are design or construction details of the wall itself; this is unusual here because the Hampstead Garden Suburb Archives Trust holds many such drawings for houses. There are some old photos though and through these we can put together some of the wall’s story, since its first building.

On Unwin’s early plans, the Great Wall is shown as a straight line for its whole length, apart from the open area, set back



from the line of the wall, which forms Sunshine Corner: this was always a feature on drawings. St Judes Church in South Square was planned as the dramatic termination of the view up the hill from the Heath via Heathgate and the widening out and the making of a public green square at its southern end integrates the wall into the wider plan of the Suburb itself.

Not only is the straightness of the boundary deflected by the southern end of Heathgate but the Great Wall is also articulated at each gazebo to form a step in its plan. The wall is not consistent in height either and the treatment of its details varies too: this first photo shows the beginning of the wall at the Hampstead Way end and here, though it starts with a robust pillar, the wall is low enough to see over (photo 1) until it abuts the first gazebo. (The pillars with hedge between which occupy this line now are clearly more recent). From the first gazebo



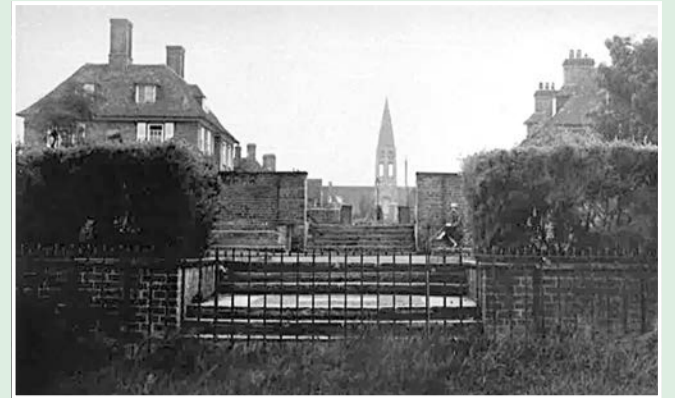
until Sunshine Corner, the wall is generally higher than this though not consistently so. This variety and the inventiveness of materials used – tiled arches of varying sizes over openings, some sections of the wall roofed, inset oak trellising - and the craftsmanship used in deploying them suggest that whoever built it was having some fun with it too. (photos 2&3).

In 1910, someone, perhaps standing on the roof of a bay window at the newly built 1 Meadway Close, took a photo looking west along what was to be Turner Drive (photo 4). The houses of Turner Drive were yet to be built around the road already laid down so that must be the rear elevation of no. 2 Heathgate with 6 Linnell Drive beyond; the wall had been built by this date and we can see its gazebos rising above the Heath Extension to the left. The wall itself, between these sentinels, is obscured by the lie of the land.



It was a surprise to see the next photo – at the foot of the steps from Sunshine Corner, there’s a spiky iron fence! The photo isn’t dated but the woman on the bench is in post first world war clothes. (Photo 5). The hedge along the top of the low wall to either side of the steps isn’t there now either: it must have impeded the view over the foreground of the Heath from the seats of Sunshine Corner. Rather more puzzlingly, the fence must have seriously restricted any access to the Heath.

The final photo is dated 1927 and the view takes in the footpath ending of Meadway Close (the brick pillars are still in place though more hidden by greenery today) and almost the full extent of the continuing boundary to its end at Wildwood



Road. The note on the back of the photo reads “spiked iron railings along GS boundary of Heath Extension. Photo taken in 1927 when it was proposed to remove them”. The fence was still in place clearly but perhaps not for much longer. In the photo, it is quite a surprise to see that the wall continues to the east of Sunshine Corner for what appears to be the full length of the boundary. Looking closely for sight of the wall now, through the high hedges, it is still in place, although, the further east it goes, the lower it is, and by the time it reaches Wildwood Road it is no more than a few courses high: the Great Wall has become a great hedge.

For almost all its life, judging by the documents, photos, periodicals and press cuttings available in the Hampstead Garden Suburb Archives now, Unwin’s big beautiful wall in Hampstead Garden Suburb hasn’t been much celebrated: unlike other Suburb buildings, it didn’t have a cutting the first sod ceremony and it wasn’t “opened” by anyone on its completion either.

It featured in early sales Prospectuses for the houses built by the Suburb Development Company, while in “Town Planning and Modern Architecture in Hampstead Garden Suburb” published in 1909 shows two or three photos looking across the Heath Extension from the future position of the wall with the caption “all the land from the Wall to the skyline is open in perpetuity. Park Lane has no such expanse before it”!

Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust, inheritors of the wall when the Development Company folded during the First World War, has recently done extensive repairs to the wall and its gazebos to the West of Sunshine Corner and, thanks to these works, we can now appreciate the craftsmanship of its execution. When seen from the further away, it is evident that the role that Unwin wanted it to play in both containing the sprawl of buildings and linking the elements of the Suburb together was achieved.

For much more information about the eccentric Charles Paget Wade, draughtsman of the wall, see the excellent book “Charles Paget Wade before Snowhill” by Paul Capewell available from the Trust office or online.

Roz Archer



The Hampstead Garden Suburb Archives Trust

exists to preserve the history and culture of the Suburb

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Annemount searches for alumni

Annemount School have again sought help from Suburb News. The school have sent us a photo of the Coronation Celebration they held in 1953 and held a reunion with several of the pupils in June.

The school would like to hear from any pupils who perhaps are still living in the Suburb and can identify themselves in the enlarged and restored photo. Even though the reunion has already taken place, the school is keen to collect memories for the interest of present pupils, and show former pupils their old school.

The present headteacher, Geraldine Maidment, can be contacted by email: headteacher@annemount.co.uk.

