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of the Garden Suburb**

Peter Hall

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**University of California at Berkeley
Institute of Urban and Regional Development**

DESIGNING THE EAST THAMES CORRIDOR: THE SECOND GOLDEN AGE OF THE GARDEN SUBURB

Peter Hall

When I received the invitation to give this lecture tonight, my first inclination was to decline. Not because I was feeling churlish or arrogant, but simply because I felt incompetent to deliver it. I never have had the slightest sense of myself as an urban designer; I came to planning through geography, and I think of myself as an urban and regional planner, with a stress on the second. My sense of urban design, I suppose, is about as highly developed as the next person's in the street. So I really felt I couldn't trespass on territory that wasn't mine.

Then I felt a double trepidation, because this was to be the Kevin Lynch Memorial Lecture. I have had something of a feeling of awe toward Kevin Lynch, ever since I first came across his work some thirty years ago. I was then going through a kind of adulation of things American, as was very common at that time. The winds of urban change were blowing across the Atlantic, bringing with them new and fresh ideas, among which some of the most remarkable were from Lynch. The notion, for instance, that the view from the road was now an important element in the design of cities. The idea that a loose grid form, with multiple centres, was perhaps a perfectly valid alternative to traditional star-shaped or dendritic cities. Those notions, and others coming from the same direction, had an enormous influence on a whole generation of British planners and of British planning. Lynch's appropriate memorial might well be not this lecture, but Milton Keynes: *si monumentum requiris, circumspice*.

That gave me a certain comfort, as I sat down about a week ago to sketch out some ideas. What could I possibly say or do, that might justify bringing you all out on a winter night like this, when instead you might — as my favourite American newspaper columnist recently put it— be curled up in front of a roaring telly?

I decided to start at the beginning. Giving two earlier lectures of a similar memorial nature, dedicated to two other equally distinguished planners, Frederic Osborn and Jimmy James, I found it helpful to ask: what would they have thought about it all? Suppose you could have brought them back from the shades, what would they have said? I decided to do the same for Lynch. What would he have told us, if we could have taken him down the East Thames from the Royal Docks to Tilbury and Gravesend? What methods would he have used, and what advice would he have given us?

Kevin Lynch had two fundamental approaches to urban design. One, which made him famous and has been imitated hundreds of times in design schools all over the world, was to ask people, absolutely ordinary people, to describe what they felt as they walked about cities or rode about them. The other was to do this himself, very meticulously, in cities all over the world. The travel journals of his Italian tour of 1952-3, which have been reproduced by Tridib Banerjee and Michael Southworth in their wonderful edition of his work, *City Sense and City Design*, are very revealing as to his method. Reading these, and other essays, I was struck by a remarkable similarity to the style of Raymond Unwin, whose remarkable tome, *Town Planning in Practice*, is in fact a textbook of urban design, likewise based on Unwin's own fantastically deep experience of what you could call the perambulatory approach to city form. This, I was convinced, was the way to go.

But there was of course a problem. Where was the model? What streets, for this particular exercise, needed to be walked as Lynch or Unwin would have walked them? For, to a remarkable extent, the East Thames Corridor is a *tabula rasa*. Of course it does have an urban structure, a remarkable structure of small waterside communities. But the overwhelming sense, as you travel the corridor, is of the vast intervening spaces of marsh or quarried chalk, always backed by the equally vast expanse of the tidal Thames. It is a very horizontal landscape, a very Eastern English landscape: often savagely degraded, often very monotonous, but possessing a kind of tremendous drama or glory of its own, because of the huge mass of water and the feeling that this is indeed England's great corridor to Europe and the world.

The townscapes are important, of course, very important. They often give an extraordinary sense of history. There is the great street market at the branching of the ways of the great eastern post road at Stratford Broadway, the old medieval herring port next to the great space of the old ruined Abbey in Barking, the high street of Gravesend climbing so dramatically away from the river; all these and others are going to have to be conserved and enhanced. But they don't really give us much clue as to what to do with the intervening space. This is going to be a job of designing not one new town, but perhaps a dozen.

We have to start with a structure. That is going to be a key remit for the consultants, Llewelyn Davies Planning, and I do not want to trespass on their territory. But I think that Lynch can help all of us here. In one of his finest general essays, an undated piece called *The Visual Shape of the Shapeless Metropolis*, he distinguishes what he calls "those dimensions which seem most crucial in perception at that scale, and which also have some likelihood for manipulation by planned action." First, interestingly, he puts "the major path system — the streets, rail lines, canals, promenades, airways." He is quite specific that "These are perhaps the most crucial elements of all." A plan, he says, would need to "specify the general sequence form of the various paths (progressive, recurrent, climactic, etc.),

as well as the principal entry and climax points." In second place he lists "The major centers, focal points or nodes," in other words "the peaks of density, or access, such as shopping centers and major terminals." The plan, he says, should "be concerned with the location of these nodal points; their general perceptual character; their relation to each other, to the path system, and to the natural features; their sense of local connection or of contrast with their wider surroundings." And third, he mentions what he calls "Special districts" which he defines as "areas of appreciable size associated with memorable activities, character, or associations": large special institutions like universities and hospitals, ports and heavy industry, the CBD or principal office districts, major open spaces or recreation zones, and special historical areas. The plan, he says, "would be concerned with the location of these districts, their visibility and accessibility from the path system, and their general visual character including spatial and activity texture, silhouette, landscaping, light, climate and noise" (Lynch, 1990: 69).

Here, I think, Lynch gives us what we need to get started. For, in the essay, he goes on to discuss alternative models of metropolitan form— a theme he had also discussed in another classic paper, *The Pattern of the Metropolis* (1961). He started, interestingly for our present purposes, with what he called *The Linear System*. This was "Organized by a set of parallel, relatively close, dominant paths, which are reinforced by the presence of a dominant edge or edges. The interplay between path and edge is an important element of the visual form. The paths are organized into rhythmically recurrent visual sequences." "Along the paths," he writes,

are a chain of distinct focal points, perhaps changing progressively in any one direction, and perhaps with some ranking of importance. Between the centers on the parallel lines run short cross-paths. Foci, cross-paths, and sequential rhythms are coordinated so that progress along one main path can mentally be correlated with that along the other main paths. There may be one main center, or several, distributed along the lines — one main path, or two or three.

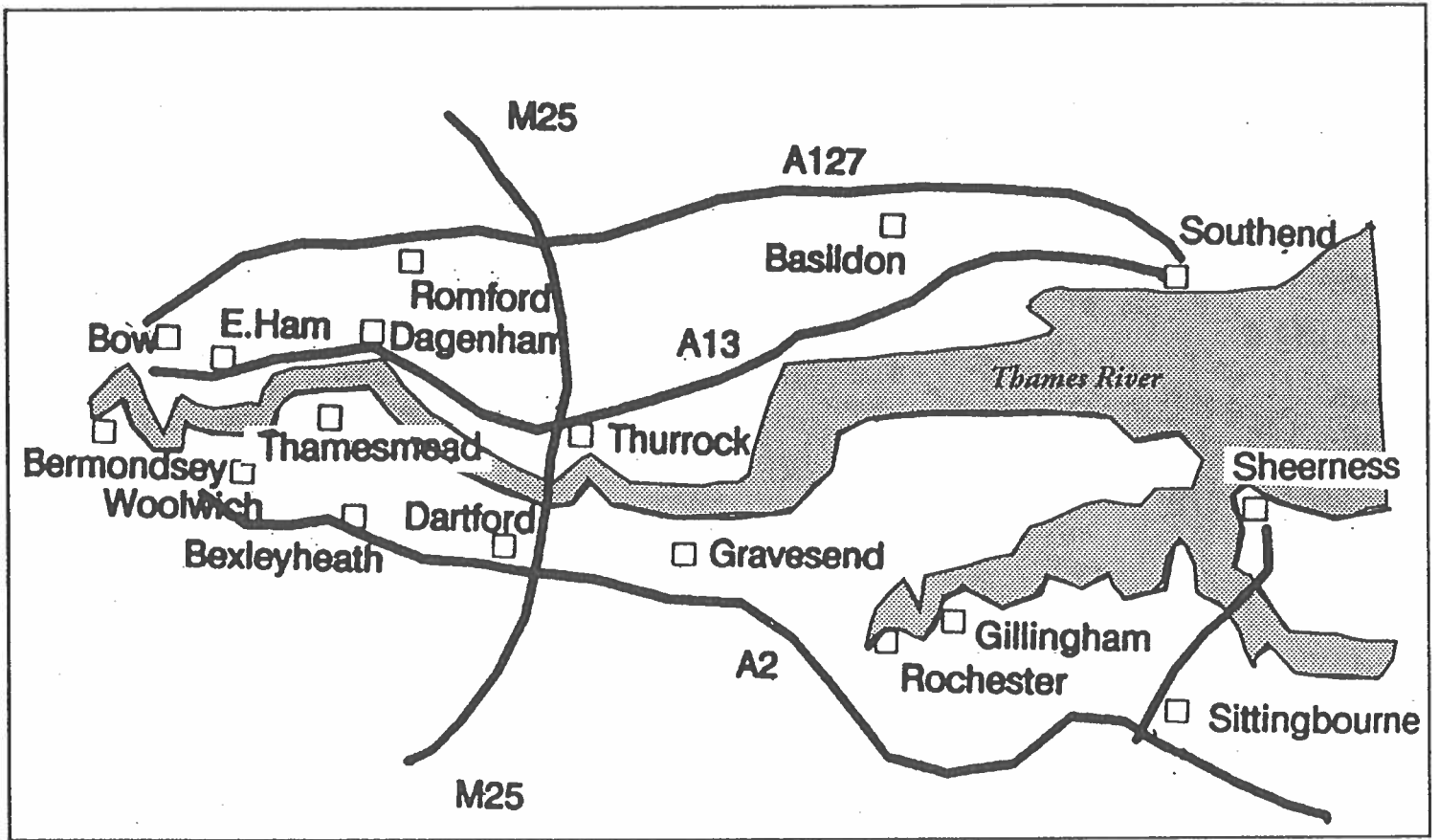
Later he says that "Major open spaces are also linear, and probably part of the edge system. They have sequential patterns along their lengths, which are also correlated with the path sequences." Lynch points out, significantly, that "This form can grow indefinitely in either longitudinal direction without losing its integrity, but can grow laterally very little. Thus it may be best fitted to sites (as on a narrow sea-coast) where lateral expansion is permanently restricted." And he concludes that "Here we have a model powerful enough to organize a large complex region, without hampering or being incongruent with its communications-dominated function (as long as the region is otherwise constrained at the sides or attracted to the center line)." He seems almost to have been describing the East Thames Corridor (Lynch, 1990: 76-7).

For the first point about the corridor, which all observers have grasped from the first analyses by SERPLAN, is the strength of the paths. First of all, there is the river itself, which gives an immensely strong linear characteristic to the entire development. Two major highways, effectively of motorway standard or planned to become such, the A13 and the A2, define its outer limits on the north and south sides respectively (see Figure 1). An additional spine, the planned Thames Spine Route including the Dartford Bypass, runs in parallel on the south side nearer the river, with frequent short cross-links to the A2. The Dartford Bridge-Tunnel and the planned East London River Crossing provide very powerful perpendicular cross-ties. Similarly, there are parallel rail spines formed by the Tilbury line on the north side and the North Thames line on the south. All that was missing was a dominant diagonal path; and the historic decision, to route the Channel Tunnel Rail Link across the corridor, has provided this.

The rail link is important in at least two ways. First, it is destined to become the main way in which people are going to travel between London and the main cities on the north-west European mainland: Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam, Cologne, Frankfurt. So it, and by definition the corridor, will provide the main first and last image of London for visitors to Britain. Lynch wrote of the view from the road; we need to be thinking of the view from the train. Traditionally, train journeys into and out of London are associated with long and dreary miles of sordid and monotonous house backs. We have to do something more glorious with the rail link. Second, if only in order to help pay for it, the rail link corridor will also need to carry the main commuter rail spine of the entire corridor, both for longer-distance commuters coming into London from East and Mid-Kent, and also for shorter-distance travellers within the corridor itself. So, in a sense, the whole corridor will be strung along this dominant spine. And that will be particularly the case, because it is certain to be the policy of any government to encourage as many trips as possible, especially trips to and from work, to be made on rail rather than on the roads.

That brings us, logically, to Lynch's "major centers, focal points or nodes." In the corridor, they almost seem to define themselves; at least, that seems to be the feeling that emerges from the analyses that have been made so far. At the western end we have two: the Royal Docks, part of the London Docklands Development Corporation, in which redevelopment has unfortunately been stalled by the current recession in the building industry, but will surely resume; and Stratford, the site of the future international rail terminal. The plan of course is that British Rail will run trains on to King's Cross, while others— running via Stratford or not will have to be determined— will go to the terminal under construction at Waterloo, which will have opened long in advance of the rail link, in 1993. There are those who believe that Stratford will be an insignificant way station on the way to King's Cross, or at most a kind of Parkway station for those who want to come by

Figure 1: The East Thames Corridor



car. It will certainly be the latter, but it will be far more than that: linked to two tube lines, the Docklands Light Rail and the new Crossrail express link across central London, it will surely become London's main European station for the City and a large part of the West End. So logically, difficult as it may be to conceive for those who look at the area today, it must over time develop the same kinds of facilities as today cluster around a major international airport.

Thus we have two of Lynch's nodes at the west end, a mere two and a half miles from each other, or four minutes on the new Jubilee line. The other major node, without doubt, has got to be somewhere on the intersection between the rail link and the M25. It could be on the Essex side, at Rainham, or on the Kent side at Dartford; it could even be at both, although then problems might arise with the number of station stops on the rail link. For this too has got to be an activity centre of far more than local importance: in fact a Euro-city, dedicated to activities that have an international dimension. One of the most important and most intriguing tasks for those who will plan the development of the corridor is exactly what mix of activities will go here, what mix in the Royals and what mix at Stratford. I can't anticipate this evening what may emerge in the final scheme. What is certain is that they will have to include an entire range of activities that we now barely conceive of as major bases of urban economies: scientific research and higher education, entertainment and cultural activities, exhibition and conference space, and centres for human interaction on a vast scale. And the resulting built forms will powerfully shape what Lynch, writing about such nodes, called "the mix of visible activity, spatial texture, the use of associated landmarks, skylines, distant visibility, entrance points, micro-climate and noise" (Lynch, 1990: 69). We need to make an effort, here, to conceive of the likely scale of development at these three nodes, and the way in which they will appear to the first-time visitor to Britain by the new rail link. There is scope here for visual drama of a very high order, and it must not be missed.

And so we have Lynch's third element, the "special districts." Some of these, too, almost define themselves. As well as being a home for a very wide array of advanced service activities, the corridor will have to continue to be a major trade route for goods. The Port of London at Tilbury, the areas of surviving heavy industry and power generation along the riverside, the possibility of large-scale freight transfer activities if the rail link were designed to carry freight, the special historic townscapes like those at Barking or Gravesend, the new community forest at the eastern edge of London, the site of special scientific interest in the Rainham Marshes— all of these will become central elements or fixed points upon which the urban design will have to be hung.

So one can almost say that the main elements of the design fall logically into place of their own accord. There will be parallel road and rail routes on each side of the Thames itself. The new rail link, and the associated commuter services, will provide an additional diagonal path linking

these others. All these will be joined by many short cross-links, two of which will be longer and of regional importance: the M25 and the new East London River Crossing. There will be two strong activity anchors at the western end, one of which will form a kind of articulation or jointing structure with the Docklands development. And there will be one or more such anchors at the eastern end. Between them, and around them, areas of special character will provide constraints and opportunities which the urban design will have to recognize.

But what about those intervening spaces? A major objective of the entire exercise, after all, must be to provide homes to meet a substantial part of the entire projected demand in the South East of England over the next fifteen years. How many, precisely, will be established only in the course of the consultants' work. But we must be talking of the equivalent of several medium-sized new communities. We are not, of course, talking about either new towns of the kind that we built in the approximately twenty years between the start of Harlow and Stevenage and the start of Milton Keynes and Peterborough. Nor are we talking about the smaller, self-contained, privately financed new communities — like Stone Bassett and Foxley Wood— that became so fashionable with the housebuilders (but so much less popular with Secretaries of State for the Environment) during the 1980s. The reason we are not talking about either is, once again, that the geographical conditions in the corridor very powerfully condition what kinds of communities can be built.

What we are talking about, I think, is garden suburbs. By definition, they are going to be suburbs, because however many jobs we can provide in the corridor itself, many of the people who come to live here will find employment in central London, while relatively few are likely to find suitable employment on their own front doorsteps. They are also going to be suburbs because the very linear form of the corridor means that the predominant direction of movement is going to be east to west, or vice versa, along the spines. And they are going to be suburbs because they will be built by private builders working to sell their houses in the market, and the market shows that the majority of people are going to be looking for fairly conventional single-family housing with private garden space.

I know that there will be those who will immediately jump up and remind me that there are huge and fundamental demographic changes like rising divorce rates and two-income childless couples; and that our dinosaur-like builders are providing homes for the market of twenty or thirty years ago. I heard that argument very persistently in the city of Adelaide, South Australia, where I have been working as regional planning consultant over the past couple of years. But, when the planners conducted a housing preference survey, they found that all these new kinds of household wanted exactly the kinds of conventional single-family housing that the old kinds always wanted. Indeed, the single mums were positively insulted that anyone should be trying to fob them off with less. And I strongly suspect that what goes for South Australia will go also for the East Thames.

The real question is what sort of suburbs. They could be good or bad. There is probably a good way of building them, one that represents one of the best British urban design traditions, the garden suburb. So I would like, without apology, to spend the remainder of my time this evening in talking about this tradition and what it might imply for design in the corridor.

The garden suburb has habitually presented in the literature as if it were a failed garden city. This is because it disappointed the purists in the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association, the precursor of today's TCPA. In fact, from the very start Howard's Association had two objectives: as well as the "building of new towns in country districts on well thought out principles," also "the creation of Garden Suburbs, on similar principles, for the immediate relief of existing towns" as well as "the building of Garden Villages . . . for properly housing the working classes near their work" (Abercrombie, 1910: 20). And the Association warmly commended the construction of Hampstead Garden Suburb, as well as the dozen or so schemes coordinated by Co-Partnership Tenants between 1901 and World War I. They did object, vociferously, to what Clifford Culpin called "quite a number of schemes which take the title 'Garden City' promiscuously, without having any claim whatever to use the name, their objects being as foreign as possible to the conceptions of the founders of the movement" (Culpin, 1913: 5). And, after World War I, C.B. Purdom, then editor of the Association's magazine and one of the true Garden City purists, complained: "There is hardly a district in which the local council does not claim to be building one, and unscrupulous builders everywhere display the name on their advertisements . . . The thing itself is nowhere to be seen at the present date, but in Hertfordshire, at Letchworth and Welwyn Garden City" (Purdom, 1921: 33).

Unfortunately, it was precisely the mythical quality of Letchworth and Welwyn, and then the postwar new towns built in their image, that has obscured the real achievement of the planned garden suburb between about 1870 and the onset of World War I. The original inspiration was American, and Howard was without doubt well aware of it, for he seems to have borrowed the very name Garden City from what was in fact a pure garden suburb outside Chicago. The garden suburb, as first conceived there, was a planned speculative housing development built around a stop on a tramway line or a commuter rail station. Dozens were built between about 1870 and 1910 around American cities, particularly in the heroic age of trolley-car and light-rail construction after 1890. The major transit barons, such as Henry Huntington in Los Angeles or F. E. "Borax" Smith in the San Francisco Bay Area, developed their very extensive systems as deliberate vehicles for real-estate speculation on a huge scale. The usual resulting pattern is very similar all the way from St. Louis to Oakland and Berkeley in California. It was a gated community, the gates symbolizing arcadian peace and protection from what was doubtless seen as the evil influences emanating from the

nearby city. Within, detached houses were built on curving street lines, with a good deal of stress on aesthetic quality in the better developments.

It was this kind of development that the speculator Jonathan Carr introduced to England with Bedford Park in west London, started in 1877 (see Figure 2). This "oasis," as the American planning historian Walter Creese describes it, was consciously planned around a railway station on the then brand-new District line extension to Richmond. Norman Shaw, who was appointed architect when the project had already started, planned a church and tavern and general store immediately next to the station, clustered around the existing open space of Acton Green, which thus served as a kind of village green where the local civic society still holds an annual "Green Day" each June (see Figure 3); a few steps away was a social club. Radiating from this complex was a complex of fairly short streets, four of them straight— one indeed originally a Roman road— and the rest curving. Even the straight streets were designed to be closed by buildings (see Figure 4). The curving streets offer a constantly changing vista to the returning commuter, who is deceived by false closures that then reveal further streetscapes.

It is a brilliant piece of design, hardly ever equalled. Creese calls it "the first sylvan setting for the middle class, where the nightingale and lark could still be heard" (Creese, 1966: 89). John Lindley, the landowner, was curator of the Royal Horticultural Society and his trees determined the ground plan. Additionally, limes, poplars, and willows were planted. Everyone, even at the time, noticed how different this was from conventional suburbs; the difference lay in the effect of greenery in breaking hard lines. So, as he points out, the effect is very un-stiff, because vistas are closed by trees, and space is established through filtered light (Creese, 1966: 89-90). The proud paterfamilias could have a feeling of "A house of his own in the country," as Betjeman put it (Creese, 1966: 91-2). Popular magazines noticed it; one wrote: "It is hardly four years since the first brick of the first houses was laid, and yet the whole place has the snug, warm look of having been inhabited for at least a century" (Creese, 1966: 89).

There is a quite uncanny parallel between Bedford Park and an American development, Forest Hills Gardens in the Borough of Queens in New York City, begun some 35 years later (see Figure 5). Here too the streets branch out from the commuter train station, with the shopping street on the other side (see Figure 6). Here too there is a similar stress on the enclosed neighbourhood — unsurprisingly, perhaps, since this project was started by the Russell Sage Foundation and provided the model for the Foundation's resident sociologist, Clarence Perry, when he developed his concept of the neighbourhood unit in the late 1920s. And, for those of you who like historical connections, he did so for the New York Regional Plan, which was being directed by Thomas Adams, a British emigré who was then regularly shuttling across the Atlantic to a planning

Figure 2: Bedford Park, Chiswick, 1896

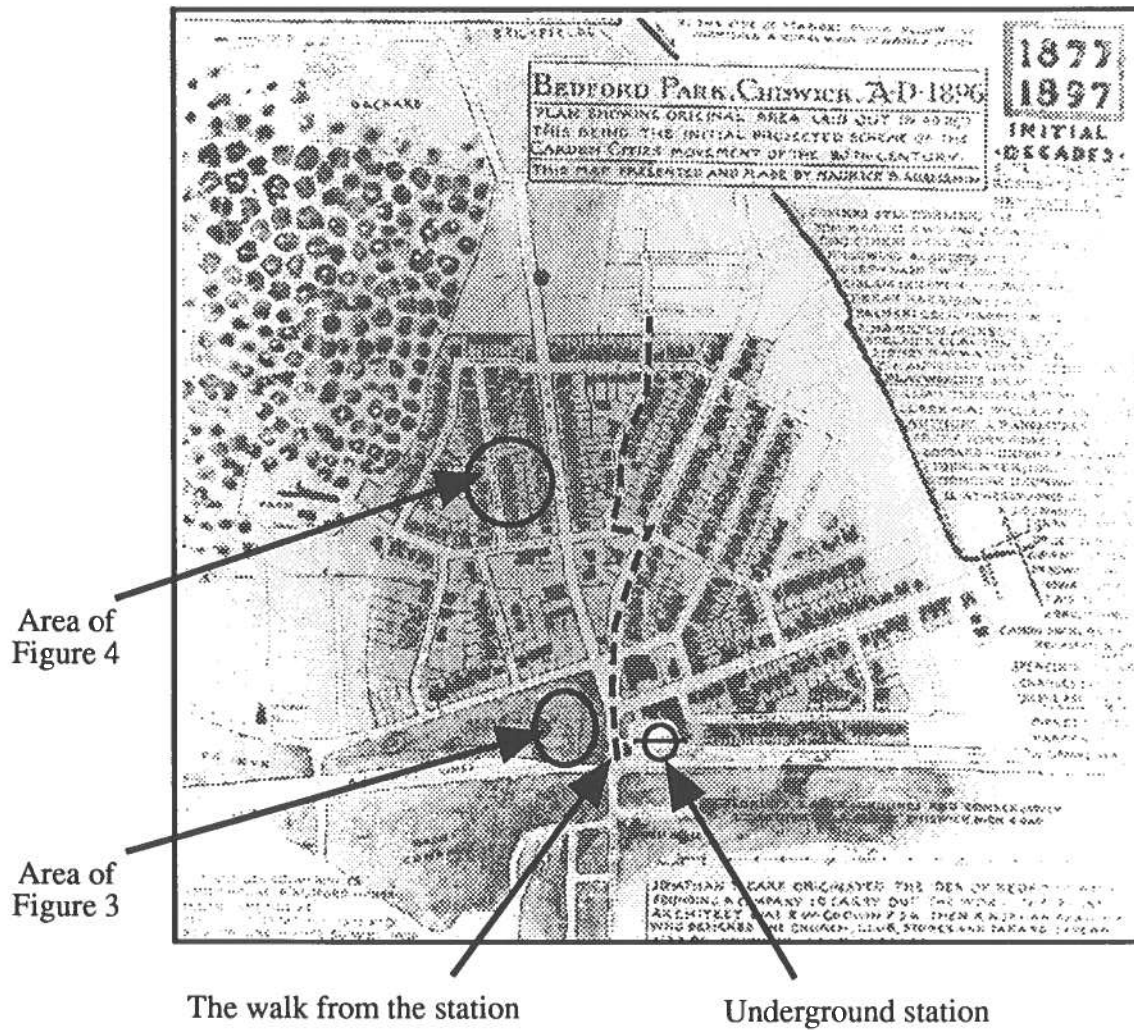


Figure 3: Bedford Park
Green, Church, Inn, Shops, Station

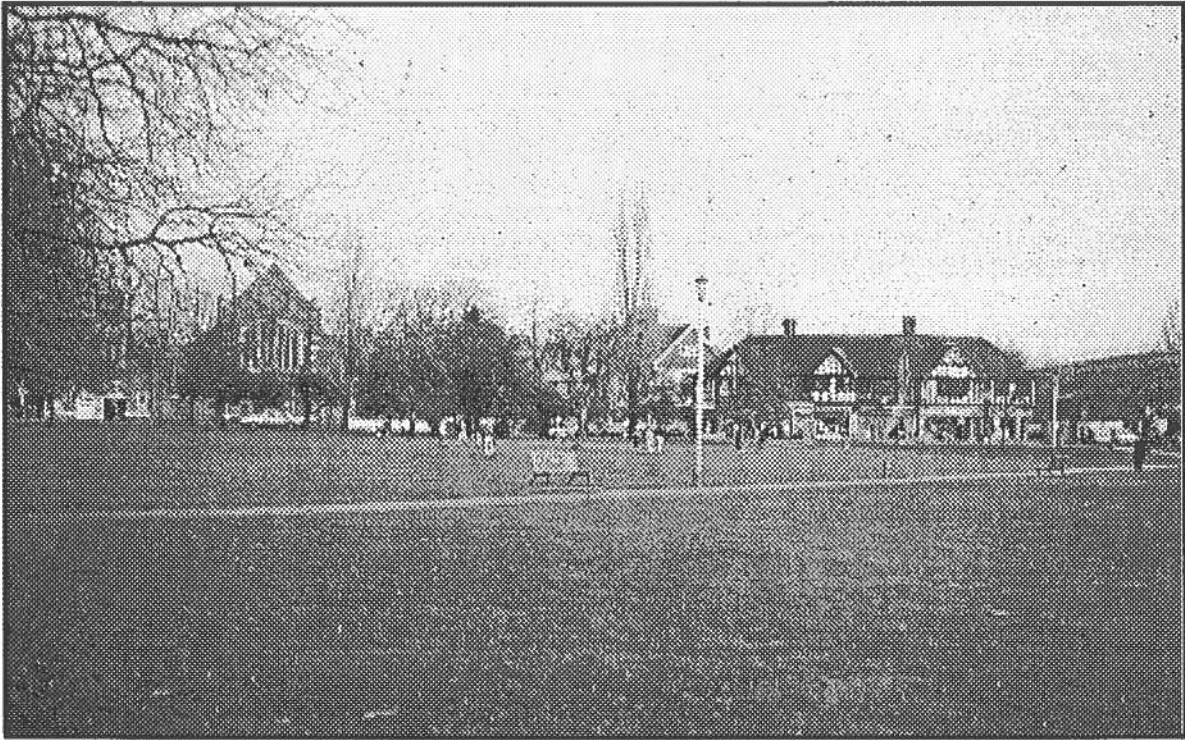


Figure 4: Bedford Park
The Walk from the Station to Home



**Figure 5: Forest Hills Gardens, New York,
as it had developed by 1930**

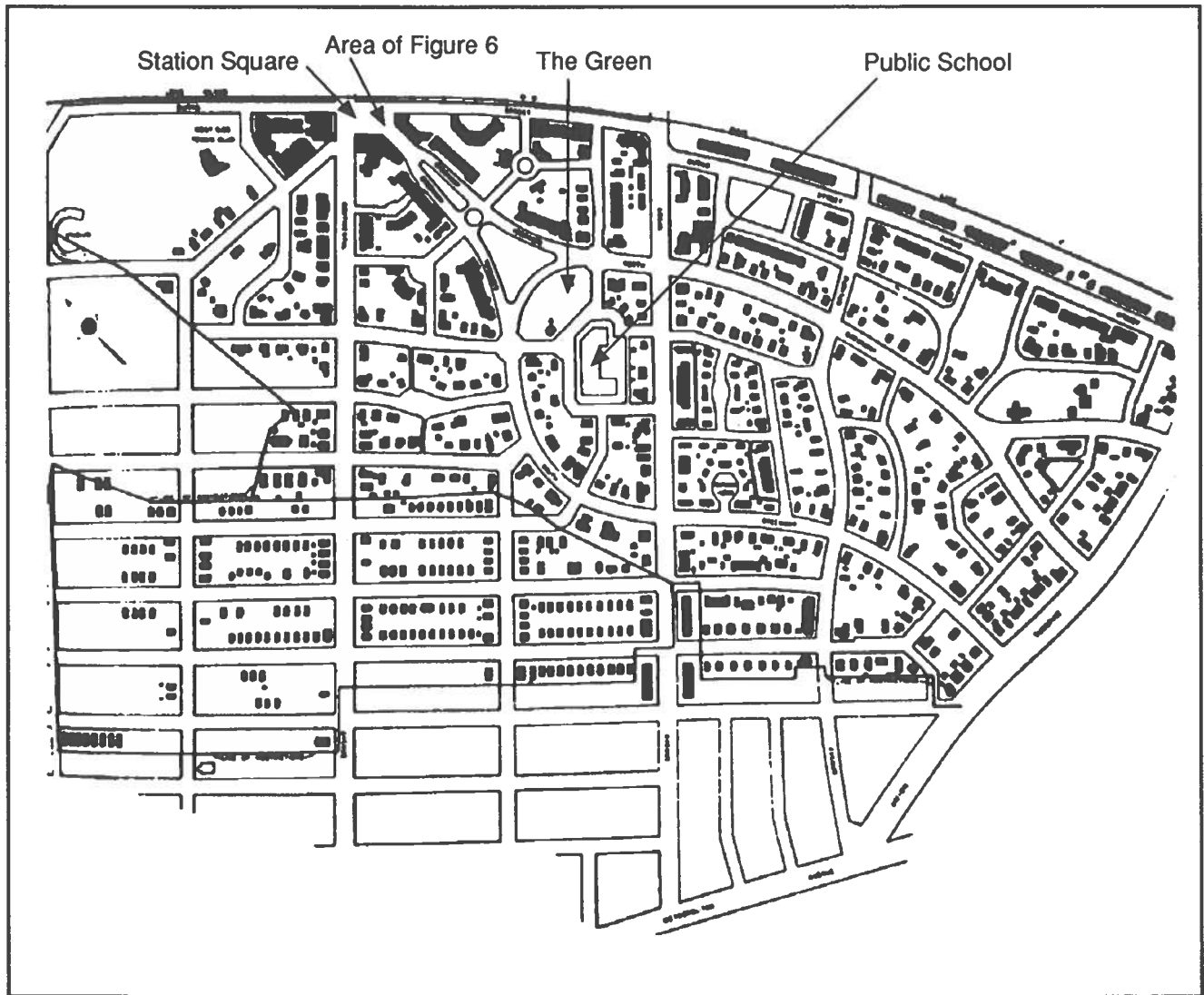
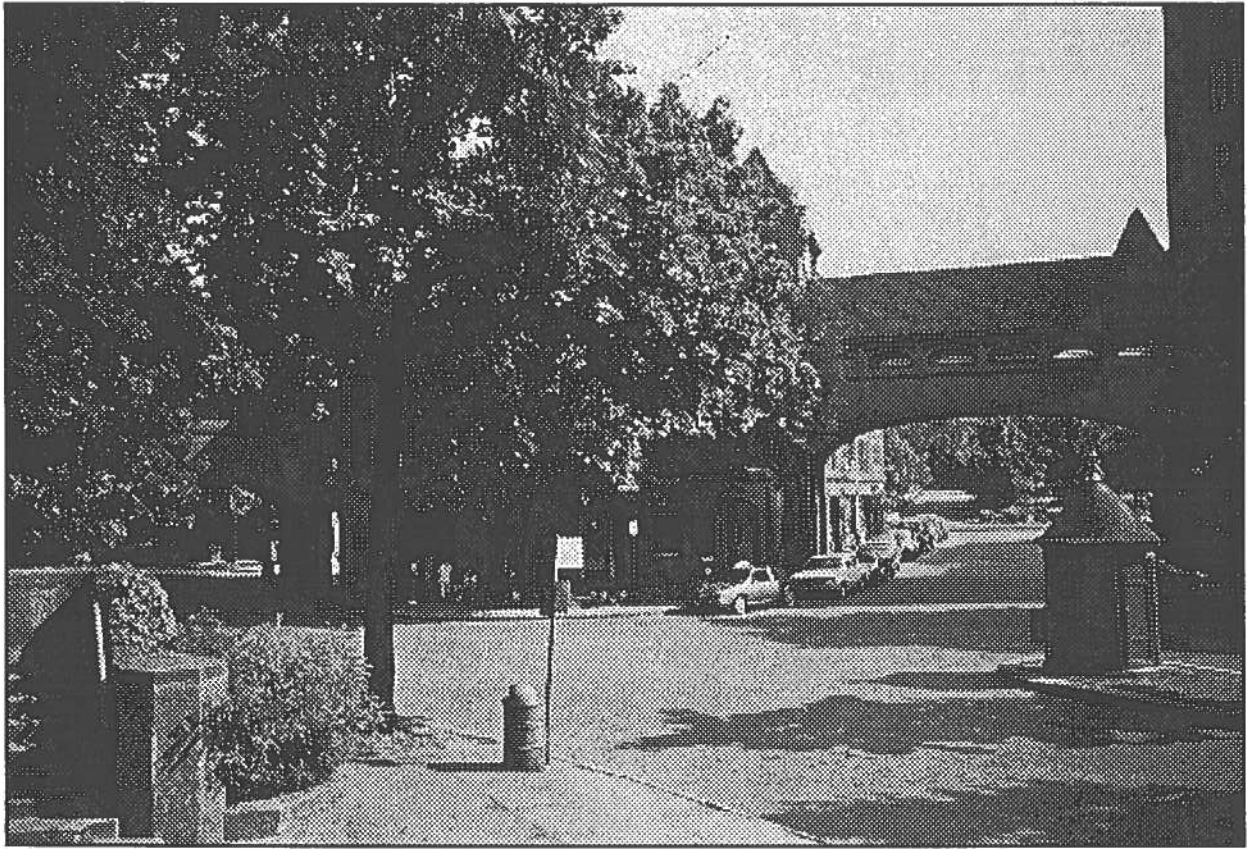


Figure 6: Forest Hills Gardens, New York



consultancy back here in London. I don't know of any conscious imitation of Bedford Park, but it seems inconceivable that the architect planner of Forest Hills Gardens, Grosvenor Atterbury, did not know of it.

The reason these two suburbs work so well, I think, is that they are deliberately and self-consciously railway suburbs. How right was one writer of the 1950s, recalling a Victorian childhood, who wrote that "Suburbia was a railway state . . . a state of existence within a few minutes walk of the railway station, a few minutes walk of the shops, and a few minutes walk of the fields" (Kenward, 1955: 74). Given that fact, all three needed to be stressed in the overall design. These best of all suburbs are deliberately focussed on station and shops. They are at the same time so related to green space that they have a sense of Arcadian, semi-rural calm. The Victorian commuter left his rural retreat to focus on the station that would take him into the bustling city; he returned to face back into the Arcadian retreat.

Now the strange fact is that Raymond Unwin, that earlier master theorist of urban design, who in so many ways anticipated Lynch, seems never to have understood this basic fact. The more one looks at Unwin's garden suburbs, the more puzzling and the more unsatisfactory they become. Creese notes that Hampstead can seem very disappointing on one visit (Creese, 1966: 220). I would have to say that it appears even more so after two or three, or ten. It is true, of course, that he could not choose his sites freely, and that he always stressed the need to adapt the design to the topography. But even so, it is impossible to avoid using the old quip about Unwin's design: that, like the curate's egg, it was good in parts. He and his collaborator, Barry Parker, are at their best at the very micro-scale, comprising a group of houses around a green or on a short cul-de-sac space, in which Hampstead abounds. At this scale, as in Bedford Park, there is a good feeling of harmony with nature, especially through tile roofs, which Unwin and Parker borrowed from William Morris; in his book Unwin stressed that roofs were very important in a town's image (Unwin, 1909: 137-8); he felt that the roofline gave a communal quality to the townscape, which is why he disliked flat roofs (Creese, 1966: 227-9).

All this is good. So is some of the street planning, again at this local scale: the special act of Parliament allowed the local by-laws to be set aside so as to create closes and culs-de-sacs. They are filled with parked cars today, but they still give the essential quality of what Creese calls "the medieval implications of mystery, safety and enclosure within the settlement" (Creese, 1966: 239). But, especially given that the site is so small — originally, only 243 acres — the larger design is, frankly, a mess (see Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Hampstead Garden Suburb,
1906**

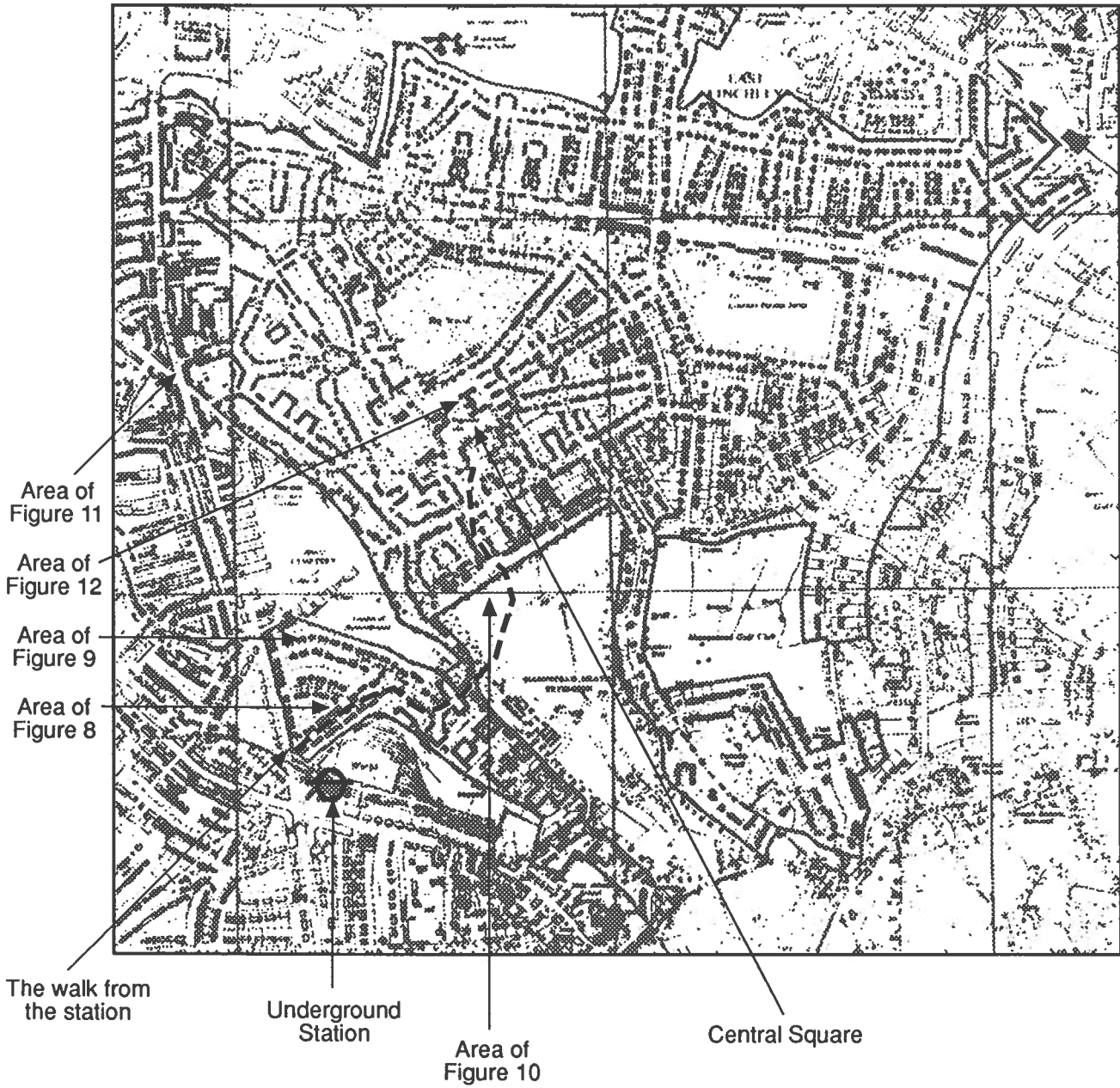


Figure 8: Hampstead Garden Suburb
The Walk from the Station to Home



To see how much a mess, arrive at Hampstead the way the Edwardian commuter would. He has a covered way down from the new Golders Green tube station. He makes a rather abrupt hairpin right turn and there is a rather low-key gateway into the suburb (see Figure 9). The new shopping centre is on his left, under the bridge; it has the same approximate relationship to the suburb as at Bedford Park, but as we shall see in a minute it doesn't work in the same way at all.

For what happens now is that he begins to navigate a long straight street that looks even longer and straighter than it actually is, which is terminated at a T-junction (see Figure 9). The street on the left takes him back to the main Finchley Road, the street he has just left. The one on the right does take him into the southern half of the suburb, but it directly serves only a narrow ribbon of houses on the east side of the Heath extension. All other residents are now required to turn again, having progressively walked east, south, east again, and finally north, to get to where they want to go.

It is all rather perverse. One cannot help thinking that Unwin had decided that this is the daily experience they ought to have. For what he has done is to lead them to his suburb by his Heath extension, which is critical to his concept because it provides a green belt and a psychological barrier *vis-à-vis* the evil city to the south. He makes such a meal of this that, as I am sure you all know, he actually builds a fake medieval wall to mark the boundary of the heath and the suburb, complete with fake medieval watchtowers (see Figure 10). And this was something that he himself says, in his book, would be an "affectation" (Unwin, 1909: 154). He says that we should seek to give an edge to towns, or to distinguish new suburbs. "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" (Unwin, 1909: 154). He suggested using narrow woodland belts, or a wide grass glade and avenue; or, in larger towns, wide belts and park land, playing fields or agricultural land may be used (Unwin, 1909: 163).

We can understand that, perhaps. The garden suburb was seen as a reaction, as a counterweight to the real and imagined evils of the late Victorian industrial city. It embodies the concept that Morris had set out in some lines of his 1868 poem *The Earthly Paradise*:

Forget six counties overhung with smoke,
Forget the snorting steam and piston stroke,
Forget the spreading of the hideous town;
Think rather of the pack-horse on the down,
And dream of London, small and white and clean,
The clear Thames bordered by its gardens green.

Given all that, the real oddity about Hampstead was that in his writing, Unwin actually stressed the value of the railway station as a kind of entrance gateway to the town (Unwin, 1909:

Figure 10: "Medieval Wall" in Hampstead Garden Suburb

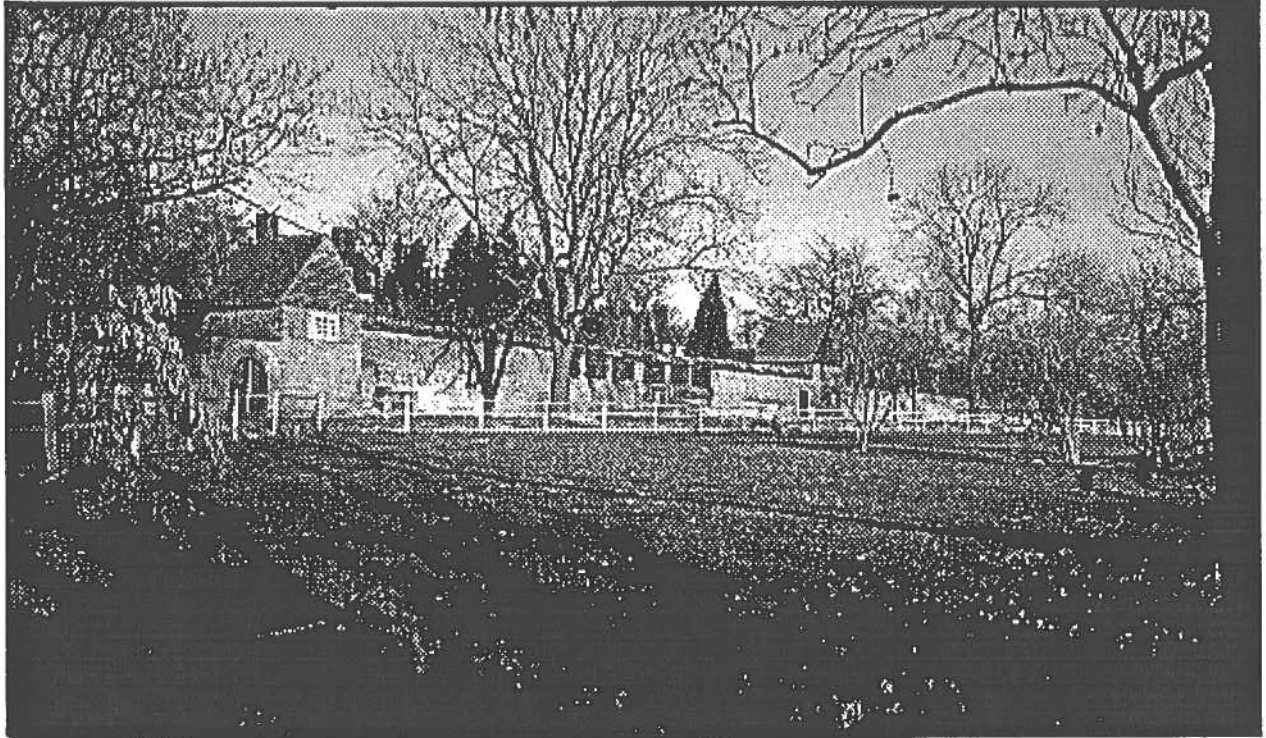


Figure 11: Gateway in Hampstead Garden Suburb



Figure 9: Hampstead Garden Suburb
The Walk from the Station to Home



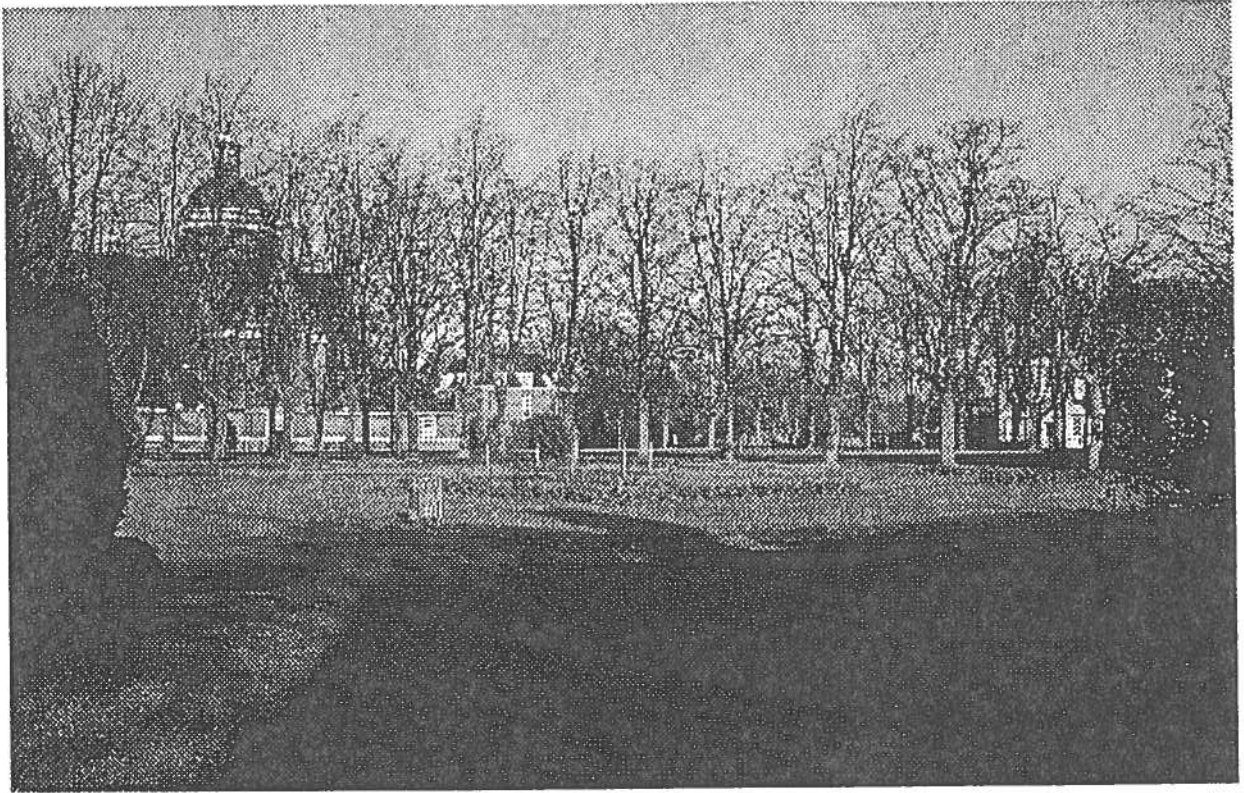
171). He says that space in front of the railway station is crucial as the point of arrival— and he repeats the point. It need not be the central point of the town, but it should be connected to the centre by a clear street pattern, so that the stranger can orient himself (Unwin, 1909: 187-9). And this main centre should be on the high ground, sometimes on a slope (Unwin, 1909: 189). If that was the aim, at Hampstead he certainly did not achieve it. The centre is on the high ground, as we shall see in a minute. But the station has no presence at all, and the connecting route is about as obscure and disorientating as it is possible to be.

The only other practical way for this Edwardian commuter to get home would be to hop on one of the tramcars of the London Metropolitan Tramways and ride another half mile up the Finchley Road, alighting at Unwin's extraordinarily fanciful Germanic gateway (see Figure 11), which he borrowed either from Rothenburg ob der Tauber, a town he constantly sketched, or from a very similar gateway which Georg Metzendorf had designed for the garden suburb of Margarethenhöhe outside Essen. It was widely noticed at the time that Hampstead followed German models, and Thomas Mawson in 1911 noted that the German style was influenced by medieval cities (Creese, 1966: 243). Unwin adopted the German style of massing buildings and achieving more effective street pictures; he knew about *Die Städtebau* when he did Hampstead, but not at the time of Letchworth (Creese, 1966: 243). According to Creese, the monumental Temple Fortune gateway was supposed to have a market place and public forum behind it, much like Margarethenhöhe; but it somehow never happened. Perhaps that is the clue to the failure of the wider design (Creese, 1966: 244). From there, it is true, the transition into the suburb is much better handled, through a dendritic pattern of curving streets which branch out in Bedford Park fashion, offering a constantly changing set of vistas. Again, the parts are brilliantly handled but not the whole.

The other curiosity about Hampstead is the centre (see Figure 12). Three huge monumental public buildings, two churches and the educational institute, are grouped in the vast space of the central square. It must be one of the most totally dead spaces in any major urban design. In all the times I have visited it, I have hardly seen a soul there. It might be blamed on Lutyens, who did the detailed design and who seems to have been going through some rehearsal for the Imperial grandeurs of New Delhi. It might also be blamed on Dame Henrietta Barnett, who was determined that churches and schools should be on the highest point, though she made a mistake about that (Creese, 1966: 220). But we have Creese's testimony that Unwin was fully in accord with the concept; we have Creese's testimony that he had conceived of a monumental-scale square as central to a garden city as early as 1901 (Creese, 1966: 231), and indeed he had done a very similar job in Letchworth.

The clue comes, once more, in his book, where he makes quite clear that the central square was intended to be like a Greek agora or Roman forum: it was to be a place for monumental public

Figure 12: Square at Hampstead Garden Suburb



buildings. He says, specifically, that "The main centre would naturally be occupied by Government or municipal buildings and others necessarily related to these" (Unwin, 1909: 176). And, to quote again, ". . . even in districts, suburbs, parishes and wards it is desirable that there should be some centre. There should be some place where the minor public buildings of the district may be grouped and where a definite central effect on a minor scale may be produced" (Unwin, 1909: 187). So it seems quite clear what the square at Hampstead was intended to be: a vast Greek agora where the citizenry would gather, presumably to hear philosophers dispute with each other or poets recite their verse. The only problem is that they don't, and apparently never did: the space doesn't work. Even odder is the fact that other major social gathering point, the community centre, is on Willifield Green half a mile away, in a similarly unvisited kind of space. It lost its tower in World War II; you have to conceive of it as looking like the centre at Unwin's other London Garden Suburb, Ealing, where the tower dominates the design (Creese, 1966: 245).

I think it is only possible to come to the conclusion that Unwin, and perhaps Howard— for this is the nature of his original design for the Garden City— actually desired this kind of void in the centre. And yet Unwin again and again stresses the importance of proper enclosure and of visual surprise in the entry into the great squares, the *places* he calls them in the book, in scores of old European cities. I can't help feeling that there was a kind of schizophrenia here. Unwin, who identified with the Fabian socialists, seems to have had some kind of antipathy to commerce. All shops are shut firmly out of the suburb, except on the remote north side where they are put right at the periphery. It's significant I think that though he mentions street markets often, he never mentions shops; the word doesn't even appear in the index of his book. But more than this: perhaps he doesn't even like the railway which is the lifeblood of his suburb. There doesn't seem to be any other reason why he should make his suburb turn its back so resolutely on the station.

To be fair to him, there were some interesting features at the larger scale. For one, there was the then-revolutionary mixture of house types, ranging in price from £425 to £3500, with rented workers' cottages forming an even lower tier. The affluent lived on the south, the middle class to the west; and there were 70 acres of workmen's cottages to the north. Getting the right mix was crucial financially, and difficult because of the site (Creese, 1966: 237-8). But in his book, Unwin underlined how important he thought it was: "Both in town and site planning it is important to prevent the complete separation of different classes of people which is such a feature of the English modern town . . . The growing up of suburbs occupied by any individual class is bad, socially, economically and aesthetically" (Unwin, 1909: 294). Traditional English villages, he said, had grouped all kinds of people on a street or on the green (Unwin, 1909: 294). There were also the planned structures for the disabled and unfortunate: The Orchard for old people (by Unwin and

Parker, 1909) or Waterlow Court for working women (by Baillie Scott, 1911) (Creese, 1966: 241). But overall, I cannot help feeling that as a suburb, Hampstead works less well than Bedford Park.

Oddly, he had handled these matters rather better at a neglected earlier exercise in the garden suburb genre, at Brentham in Ealing (see Figure 13). Here too the station was newly opened. It happens to be in the floodplain of the River Brent, which was unbuildable. Unwin makes a virtue out of this, by using the floodplain as a half-mile wide green belt— the same device as he would use with the Heath extension at Hampstead — and then having his returning commuter traverse a half-mile walk down a country lane through the meadows (see Figure 14). We need to remember that, in his book, he reiterated the point that the site should be treated with "reverence" (Unwin, 1909: 136).

It is very clear, I think, what Unwin was trying to achieve here. In a lecture he gave in Manchester in 1912, he commends the idea of a "green girdle" and "Park ways" around Chicago (Unwin, 1912: 44) — an idea his colleague Parker was later to follow outside Wythenshawe outside Manchester . He argued that each suburb should be distinguished by "some belt of open space, park land, wood land, agricultural, or meadow land, which would at once define one suburb from another, and keep the whole of the inhabitants in intimate touch with ample open space" (Unwin, 1912: 48). Low-lying land was especially suitable for this purpose, he said. What happens as a result at Brentham must have been idyllic on a June evening, but less so in November. It is not even idyllic in June any more, because the path from the station has been brutally bisected by six lanes of the Western Avenue. And, in a less civilized age, when planning has to recognize the reality of muggings and rapes and attacks on children, it is a nightmare.

At Brentham, too, the shops are shunted off outside the suburb— and on the other side from the railway approach. The idea presumably was that the men went off one way, the women another. But it is odd that the men could not even buy a newspaper or a box of matches on the way to the station. The social club is at least planned at the main focal point of the suburb, but it is totally unrelated either to the station approach, which actually slips surreptitiously into the suburb by a kind of back entrance a quarter of a mile away, or to the shops (see Figure 15). Consequently, though there is a focus, it is nothing like the focal point it ought to be. It certainly doesn't work in the way that the main constellation of buildings works at Bedford Park.

I have been spending a long time in talking about railway suburbs of long ago. But I think it's important that we revisit them, because we look like having to design a new generation of such places. The East Thames Corridor is just the most spectacular opportunity, but others will occur along the new light rail systems that have become the vogue in the late 1980s, and that are actually

Figure 13: Map of Brentham

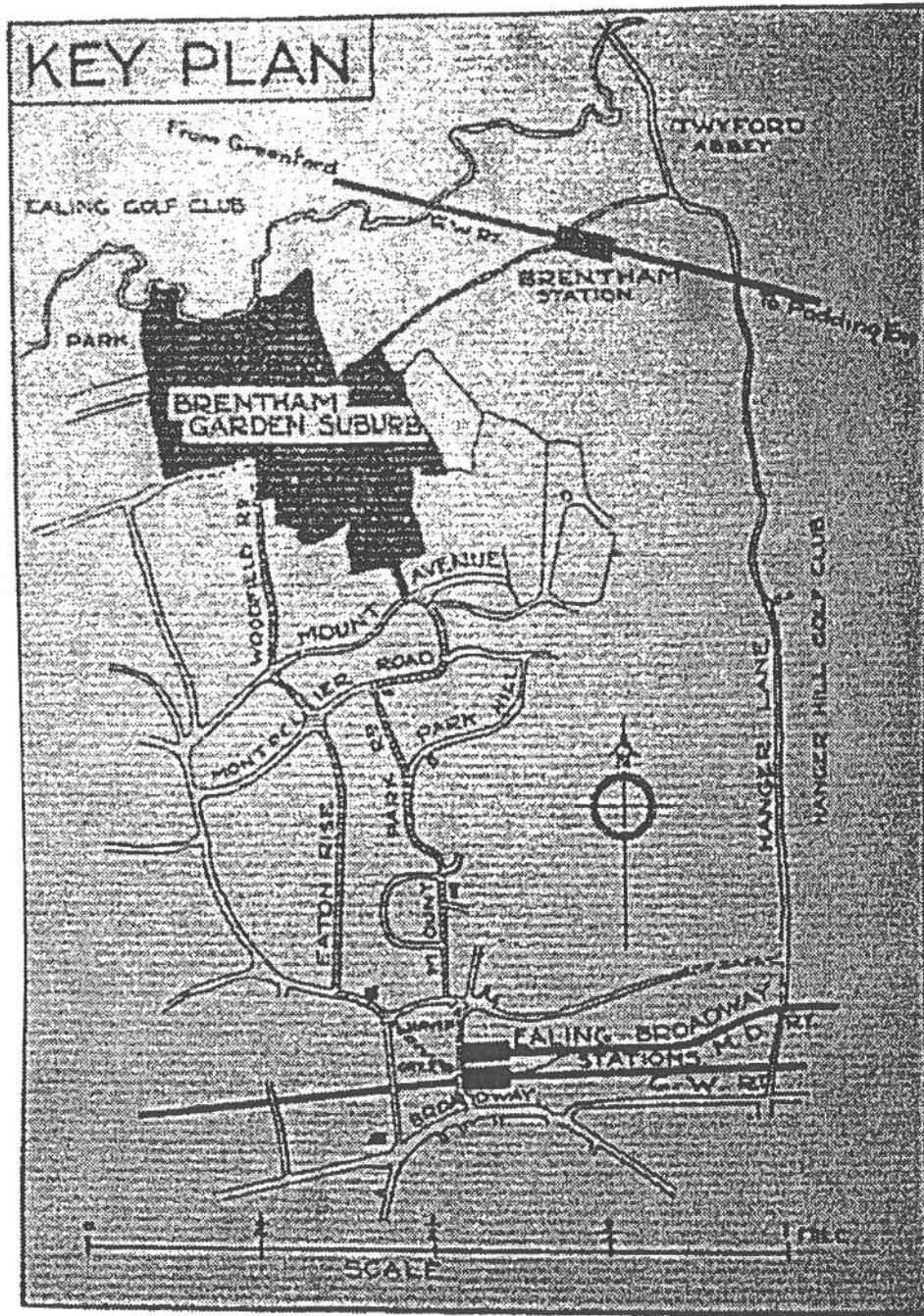
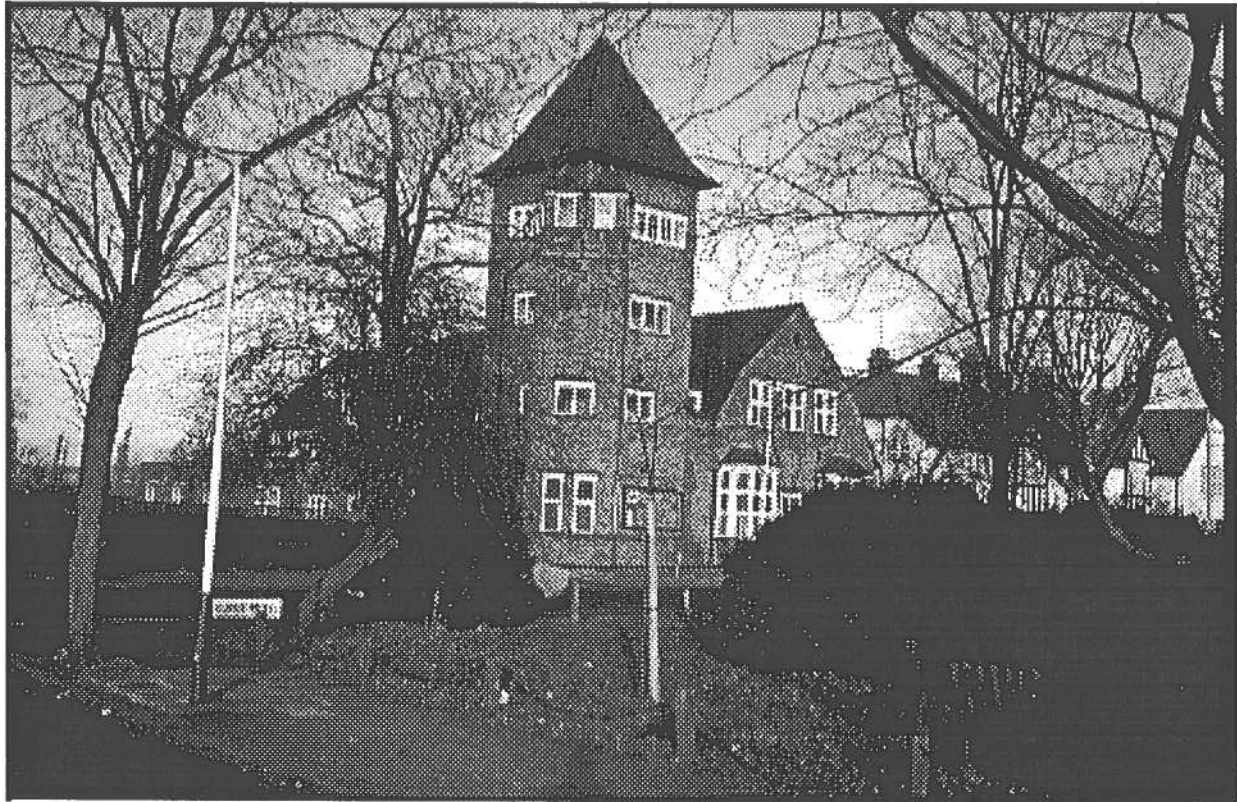


Figure 14: Brentham
The Approach from the Station through the Fields



Figure 15: Brentham Community Center



being built in Manchester and Sheffield. In California an emigre English architect, Peter Calthorpe, has been causing a great stir with his concept of the pedestrian pocket, which is nothing more or less than a railway suburb for the 1990s. Sacramento, the state capital, is so enthusiastic about the idea that it is developing its entire master plan around it. So I think it is very clear that this is an idea whose time has come round again.

Clearly, these latter-day garden suburbs are going to have to take account of a whole range of considerations that our urban designer forefathers never had to worry about. The new concern for personal safety, which runs counter to every good principle of designing quiet pedestrian access to places, is just one. Another, very evidently, is that however hard you try to design suburbs to persuade people to use convenient public transport, large numbers of them are still going to commute by car. This means that in Lynch's terms your path system will have to provide— both in functional and visual terms — for another pattern of access into the suburb. Should that be a totally different one, or should we try to focus both the highway and the rail system on to one central entry point, which would also contain the shops and the community facilities?

And the mention of shops raises another hornet's nest. Shaw at Bedford Park could provide one small General Store. Unwin at Brentham was content to provide a modest row of shops. Now the inhabitants will expect a Sainsbury or a Tesco superstore. How do you incorporate that into the urban fabric without destroying all the arcadian quality you are seeking to develop? Would it be possible, as Calthorpe believes, to produce an urban form where large numbers of people would be willing to wheel their shopping home without need for the car? Or will it be necessary to banish the store, just as Unwin did, outside the suburb?

Or would it be possible, perhaps, to square the circle by incorporating a kind of front and back access, one inward-facing and foot-based, the other looking outward and car-based? And if so what does that entail for the pattern of circulation? Can we go back to the principle of segregating foot movement and car movement, first developed at Radburn, perfected in Greenbelt and later in the Stockholm suburbs? And can we make that compatible with personal safety— the new planning nightmare of the late 20th century?

Thus the challenge of designing suburbs for the 21st century is at least as great as the one that faced Unwin and Parker when they began their work in Derbyshire almost exactly one hundred years ago. It is certainly as great as the one with which Kevin Lynch wrestled between 25 and 35 years ago, when as a young designer he first had to think about the impact of mass motorization on the American city. It is going to require a huge cooperative effort involving the professions, the political decision-makers, and the public who are going to live and work in the new urban forms.

So let me leave you with a quotation from Unwin, with which he concluded his Manchester lecture of 1912. It is pretty appropriate, I think, eighty years later.

Planning, then, calls for a great co-operative effort to recreate in our cities worthy dwelling places for our social life . . . The engineer and the surveyor must be willing to co-operate with the artist, guiding him on sound and practical lines, but giving him the freest possible hand in dealing with the forms of expression; and the architect must cease to regard each unit in itself, of which he may make what he likes, and must learn to treat it as a detail in the greater street picture, and must regard it as his first duty the subordination of that detail to a total effect of ordered beauty, which the citizens must learn to require and appreciate, that each may in this way do his share towards the creation of a beautiful city (Unwin, 1912: 62).

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